

# 很想很想你

墨宝非宝

著



这世上，总有一个人的声音，让你听了  
怦然心动。而他，属于你。

MISS  
YOU

江苏凤凰文艺出版社

# Really, Really Miss You

(很想很想你)

Chapter 01-53

Complete

Mo Bao Fei Bao

(墨宝非宝)

## Story Description:

Our male and female lead are in the online entertainment circle, he on the dubbing side and she on the music cover side. The circle is one where physical appearance is generally anonymous and you are known by your online handle and your voice. Gu Sheng, a relatively unknown online singer who goes by the handle Sheng Sheng Man and who specializes in cover songs of ancient-style music, is a huge fan of Qiang Qing Ci, a very famous and well-loved CV (character voice) artist (i.e. dubber, voiceover artist). It was like, love at first listen.

One morning, she was chatting with a friend in her online “room” when his voice suddenly appeared in her headset, describing to her in detail how to prepare a food dish she had been talking about. This began their online chats about food. Gu Sheng can scarcely believe that she is talking to her idol, and he seems to be trying to progress the relationship further.

Original Story can be found here: [Link](#)

# Introduction

After a while, he seemed to have eaten until he was satisfied, and he gave an indistinct chuckle. “Forget it. Let’s think about what we are going to have for dinner first. We’ll leave this to decide later.”

“Wait, no,” Wwwwk suddenly let out a laugh. “I have a suggestion. Before we go, how about we make a private little souvenir?”

“Private souvenir?” Feng Ya Song [Elegant Ode] chimed in.

“Sheng Sheng loves Toupai ’s[1] voice the most. This, we can all tell. Toupai also said that he loves Sheng Sheng’s voice the most..... Since Fei Shao [Young Master Fei] has offered us the use of his recording studio for free, this is a rare opportunity. It’ll be a waste if we don’t record a few more things as souvenirs. Since the two of you so... love... each other...” Wwwwk deliberately paused for half a beat and rubbed his chin before continuing, “... ‘s voices, why don’t you record a duet right now?”

Fei Shao’s eyes lit up as he ripped off his baseball cap excitedly. “Dang! Awesome suggestion!”

.....

A..... live duet with Toupai?

Gu Sheng’s blood pressure, which had just fallen back down not long ago, immediately soared. She stole a glance at the studio, imagining herself and Toupai in that soundproof room... face to face singing... and...

This was not a KTV, k? There’s honestly so much ambience in there, k? Two people in that glass room, a bunch of onlookers on the outside..... T T

Even when she was at a KTV before, she had never sung a duet with a boy in front of a whole bunch of people. T T

“Mm. Sure,” Toupai agreed, not showing any awkwardness. “We can upload it onto 5sing[2] after we are done recording. Consider it as a Valentine’s Day gift to the fans.”

Valentine's Day... gift...

Alright... Many daren[3] in the online world like to do something on special occasions like Valentine's Day, Children's Day, etc. Normal, totally normal.

Gu Sheng was still digesting this suggestion, but he, after thinking briefly, was already saying, "Shang Ye [Oh Heaven]... okay with you?"

Those two words, shang ye, coming from his lips, seemed to carry a heartrending sense of bleakness.

The heckling crowd surrounding them went completely quiet.

The mountains will crumble, heaven and earth will come together, and only then will I cease to love you.[4]

Wha...?

Really. So. Attention-Grabbing.

Gu Sheng had completely frozen.

Qiang Qing Qi was an action-oriented person. After saying this, he was already asking the recording engineer to search for the background music and motioning to her that she could go into the soundproof live room. Soon, Fei Shao, with an evil smirk on his face, had very considerately printed off the lyrics and brought them over to the two of them.

Gu Sheng walked over to stand next Qiang Qing Ci, put on a pair of headphones, and glanced at the faces of everyone standing on the other side of the glass wall. She honestly felt like she was going to have a heart attack.....

DaRen, were you planning on completely changing over your style right before you retire from the entertainment circle and starting to seek out rumors and gossip? T T

Meeting for the first time and already recording a duet in the studio. Was this really okay...?

With one hand covering her headset, Gu Sheng heard Qiang Qing Ci ask her, "Need to practice a few times?"

“I...” Gu Sheng forced herself to forget that there were actually seven or eight other people quietly listening in on what the two of them were saying. “I might need to practice along with the background music one time. DaRen... how would you like to work out the parts?”

Qiang Qing Ci’s eyes sparkled with laughter. Glancing at her, he put on his headphones and answered, “The opening of this song is really high. I’ll sing that part. The rest...” He picked up a pen and marked off a few lines. “We’ll sing these lines together. The rest you sing by yourself, okay?”

.....

.....

Was this really ok.....?

Girls were supposed to be able to sing higher than men... T T

If Toupai’s fans heard this, they would on one hand be saying, all starry-eyed, “DaRen, you’re amazing!” while on the other hand be saying Sheng Sheng Man was completely useless... But Gu Sheng guessed that, even if she did try to sing that high, her voice would crack. Based on the fact that Toupai had so effortlessly sung “Zue Meng Xian Lin” [Drunken Dream in Divine Rain][5], Toupai was probably more suited for this song.

But...

That other little spirit in her that was Toupai’s diehard fan was reprimanding this little spirit that was trying her best to keep level-headed: Even if I never heard him sing Zui Meng Xian Lin, I still have complete faith in my DaDa[6] . No problem at all!!!

Fine.

The level-headed spirit surrendered.

In reality, from the moment she stood in this soundproof room next to Toupai, level-headedness had completely left her.

Gu Sheng was very familiar with this song. In a low voice, she read through the lyrics once or so, making sure she wouldn’t not know the

words while halfway through singing or something embarrassing like that. Feeling that she was about ready, she said, “DaRen, I’m good.”

Qiang Qing Ci answered her with an “uh huh” and then said, “You can call me Qiang Qing Ci, or you can call me Mo Qingcheng. You don’t have to keep calling me ‘DaRen.’”

.....

In her headset, she could hear clamoring coming from the group of people on the other side of the room again.

“Sheng Sheng, say it, say it. The best would be to call him Qing Ci or Qingcheng...”

“That’s enough, Feng Ya Song.” Dou Dou Dou Bing [Bean Bean Bean Cake] frowned at him before turning to the glass and offering her advice. “Sheng Sheng, calling him Qiang Qing Ci will make it seem like you two aren’t very close. Mo Qingcheng would be better, yes? Huh?”

“I agree.” Wwwwk’s opinion was concise and to the point.

“I agree, too.” Fei Shao immediately chose his group to join.

Even Jue Mei [Perfectly Beautiful] finally stood up from the sofa, walked over to stand behind Fei Shao, placed a hand on Fei Shao’s shoulder, and said seriously, “Sheng Sheng, if you want to progress the relationship further into the world of real life, you will need to call him Mo Qingcheng.”

.....

All you, DaRens...

Did we really need to be this serious about this kind of thing? T T

“Whatever you wish to call me will be okay.” Even Toupai could not tolerate the people outside anymore. He couldn’t hold back his laughter as he said, “I just didn’t want you to feel too uptight.”

“Alright...” She nearly slipped and said DaRen again but immediately managed to stop herself. “Uh. Mo... Qingcheng.”

( ◡ ◡ ◡ )..... Why did I suddenly get the feeling like this was a blind date?

And it was a blind date surrounded by nosy aunties watching as my date and I introduced ourselves to each other...

Gu Sheng could swear she must have been blushing right then. She raised one hand unconsciously to the side of her headphones, acting as if she needed to study the lyrics, to partially block her face from view. Seeing that the two of them were ready, the recording engineer quickly started the background music. The two of them followed Toupai's plan and without much trouble, familiarized themselves with the song along with the music.

Seriously, Toupai was someone who could really sing.

Gu Sheng had to sing her part while still giving part of her attention to listen to Toupai sing.

Listening to someone sing at such a close distance like this, especially when this someone was the perfect Toupai, was definitely a scene she had never imagined before. After practicing through nearly once, Toupai very diligently told her that they would have to sing through another time and even did not forget to thoughtfully advise her, "Don't put too much effort into your voice right now. This time, we will find the feeling in the song first before we start to do the actual singing. Save your breath and energy for later."

Gu Sheng nodded.

But, when she discovered that the second time around, Toupai did not even need to look at the lyrics... she realized that this second practice was really only for her benefit...

This time, besides singing himself, Toupai was mainly paying attention to her. After he had finished singing his own part, he immediately looked over at her. Gu Sheng originally could have come in at her part just fine, but with his one glance, she actually stumbled in early.

"Sheng Sheng, don't be nervous, don't be nervous," Dou Dou Dou Bing could not help teasing. "Even though I totally understand you, that

completely normal feeling where you can't stay calm after the exceedingly gorgeous Toupai DaRen has taken one look at you... But, it gets better after you get used to it."

Mo Qingcheng's eyes glanced over to the other side of the glass wall. Silence fell immediately.

Gu Sheng forced herself to not get distracted and was finally able to get through this round.

"It's for real now, little girl." Even the recording engineer was finding this situation very amusing. "It's okay. Once you have officially sang through once, there will be a lot of lines you will each have to go back to re-record separately."

"Alright." Gu Sheng's face was burning.

Everyone here was clearly amusing themselves by making fun of her, k?  
T T

First time meeting all of them too, you know...

"Don't be nervous." Toupai's voice was low and soft and had the power to calm a person's heart.

Very quickly, the musical intro of the song could be heard.

[[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kn-iZL2ob1U>]]

With one hand on the microphone's frame, Mo Qingcheng finally started singing the first line along with the background music: [0:18]  
"Your wedding gown like fire has scorched the horizon Henceforth, the setting sun will sear my heart ['til red] like vermilion..."

When he opened his mouth to sing the first note, Gu Sheng swore she clearly heard her own heartbeat.

Seriously, it sounded so good it could make people cry.

Effortless high notes that carried an intense sense of anguish and unwillingness to let go.

He even gave the listeners the feeling that he was the general in the



story – someone who did not want to give in, did not want to let go of the woman he loved, but caught between the country and the princess, he had no choice but to only stand and watch as the princess left, to allow her to enter into a political marriage...

Gu Sheng was a person who loved music, and at the same time, she loved any stories set in the ancient times.

The cruelest thing in the world, perhaps, was after having possessed something, to lose it again. Those beautiful feelings, if one had never experienced them before, would not be etched into the bones and engraved on the heart. And then to use a knife and slice away, one inch at a time, those veins and bones that were joined together because of love. That was really too cruel.

As she sang this song, she could not help looking straight up at Mo Qingcheng.

Mo Qingcheng's deep black eyes also carried her reflection in them.

As the two of them neared the end of the song, that gentle yet sorrowful section, she deliberately sang slightly offbeat to Mo Qingcheng. His male voice sang first followed by her clear and somewhat mournful repetition of his lyrics.

[3:28]“Drifting petals are falling again in this season,

Yet your wedding gown is more brilliant than those falling flowers  
Your lips move, as if once again to sing ‘Shang Ye’ [Oh Heaven]

But what you say is ‘I am willing to part from my love for him.’”

What a sorrowful sentence: I am willing to part from my love for him.

As Gu Sheng sang the last note, she found she was having difficulties removing herself from the story.

But she was suddenly surprised to hear Toupai suddenly start to speak some lines, lines that had not even appeared once when they were rehearsing. “I desire to know you deeply and love you. Forever may this be unchanging...[7] ”

He even... changed the word in the poem from “jun”[ancient style; means “you” when addressing a man] to “er.”[ancient style; means “you” when address a woman]

In Mo Qingcheng’s voice, she could hear a sense of understanding, as if he, too, was captured within this story.

Blossoms swirling in the sky of Chang’an. The smell of blood, strong as wine, carrying on the wind.

He looked straight into her eyes and told her, “’Til the different directions of the world no longer exist, ‘til the seas dry, only then will I cease to love you.”

\*

[1]头牌 Toupai. Nickname for Qiang Qing Ci. This word means “leading actor/singer/performer” or “star” or “headliner performer” i.e. the biggest name and biggest crowd-drawer.

[2] 5sing.com Chinese website used to share music. Similar to soundclick.com. Users can upload, share, and download original songs, covers, background music, etc.

[3] Literally meaning “big person.” A respectful form of address to a person of authority. In this case, the big names in the online entertainment circle are addressed as “DaRen.”

[4] Taken from the ancient poem, 上邪 “Shang Ye” [Oh Heaven]

[5] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhkJeaTFxDE&noindex=1>

[6] Literally, “big big.” In the online world, DaDa is used to refer to someone who is highly skilled or capable [7] The first two lines of the ancient poem, Shang Ye.

\*

### Additional Comments:

The ancient poem, 上邪 Shang Ye is a love song – a song about a girl who will stay faithful to the love in her heart. Here’s a translation of it.

上邪！

Oh Heaven!

我欲与君相知

I desire to know you deeply and love you

长命无绝衰

Forever may this be unchanging

山无陵

‘Til the mountains crumble

江水为竭，

The rivers run dry

冬雷震震

Thunder roars during the winter

夏雨雪

Snow falls during the summer

天地合

Heaven and Earth come together

乃敢与君绝！

Only then will I cease to love you!

And here is the translated synopsis and lyrics for the entire song, Shang Ye, which is currently my most played song in my playlist. Read through and let me know if it made you cry like it did to me.

Synopsis:

[0:01] In 2012, the Shanxi Xi'an archaeological team discovered a tomb. From the epitaph inscription in the tomb, it was determined that it was the joint tomb of a general and a female of imperial lineage. The main chamber of the tomb contained a double coffin to allow the burial of two people together, but that coffin contained only a single male corpse.

What was unexpected, however, was that the title of the woman of imperial heritage that was inscribed on the epitaph was identical to that of a princess who, in historical records, had married to a border area in a political marriage.

[O:18] Your wedding gown like fire has scorched the horizon Henceforth, the setting sun will sear my heart ['til red] like vermilion It is said that peach blossoms can be found in your eyes

But how is it that in one evening, those blossoms fell like rain?

[O:47] I ask, who can lend to me a chance to look back?

To go against the current, to recall those fleeting years that long slipped by To follow along, again, as you softly sing to me 'Shang Ye' [Oh Heaven]

To see you once again

[1:13] In those yesteryears that have long ago passed

I laughed at you for too easily promising your hand in marriage [1:26] It was you who used all of you to recite 'Shang Ye'

Yet, I too easily turned my back on you, a wife beautiful as a flower That year, flower petals filled the sky of Chang'an

I could hear the sobbing and blood on the spring wind from the outer pass.

[2:21] The smell of blood on the wind is strong like wine

In my ears, the sound of warfare seems to swallow the wilderness Against the light of flames, the returning geese are also letting out their sobs The sound of weeping carries far

[2:48] That song, 'Shang Ye' that you used to sing

Hereafter I will never again be able to clearly hear it

[3:00] What cannot be defeated is the passage of time that flows like water Our country had long ago already said eternal farewells for you and I And so, you carved your name into the historical scrolls

So now, let me carve your name onto my tombstone

[3:28] Drifting petals are falling again in this season,

Yet your wedding gown is more brilliant than those falling flowers Your  
lips move, as if to once again sing 'Shang Ye'

But what you say is 'I am willing to part from my love for him.'

# Prologue: Peppered Pork Stomach and Chicken Soup

“I’m telling you, I’m on the bus right now.” Gu Sheng’s headset was on, and she was chatting with her roommate in her YY chatroom. “Wait until I get back to the dorm to talk some more, okay?”

It was six o’clock in the morning. This was the first bus of the day. The sky was still dark.

A certain little moderator of a certain website was chasing after her, intent on getting this little unknown singer to sing a birthday song for the website’s anniversary celebration.

She was too lazy to type, so she pulled her into her own YY chat room instead.

Her roommate had a rather impatient temperament and had to finish what she wanted to say before she would stop talking. Gu Sheng listened indifferently as she leaned back in the last row of seats and stared out at the empty bus.

The two had finished talking about official business, so they started chatting about personal things. When it came to “personal things,” the topics that two single, bored girls talked about ranged from gossip to Taobao[1] and eventually landed on food.

“I went to eat hot pot yesterday. It was super delicious.” Gu Sheng suddenly remembered yesterday evening’s lavishly huge meal.

“What type of hot pot?” Geng Xiaoxing asked her. “Hai Di Lao? Liu Yi Shou? Little Fat Sheep?[2]”

“Pork stomach and chicken soup base.” Gu Sheng’s eyes squinted as she reminisced over the taste. “More precisely, it should be peppered pork stomach and chicken. It was a pot of ‘red and white soup.’ The white side was just that basic soup base. The red side was Taiwanese style pork blood with aged tofu added into the soup. Do you know how awesome pork blood and tofu taste when they’ve been cooked in a spicy red soup?”

Gu Sheng loved to eat. When she talked about good food, her voice would become extremely warm and tender, much more tender than when she was singing a cover for those ancient-style songs.

There were only two or three people on the bus, none of whom had eaten breakfast, and all their stomachs were rumbling in hunger.

Suddenly hearing a girl speaking gently and in detail about piping hot pots of soup was truly a form of torture, especially since this girl's voice was slightly nonchalant and a little husky, making it even more tantalizing.

"Sheng Sheng, are you taking revenge on society, in general? Or are you just taking revenge on me?" Still lying in bed with feelings now of intense hunger, Geng Xiaoxing's voice quivered.

"This is the first time I realized that pig stomach and chicken stewed together could be so tasty. Boiled until it makes a milky-white soup base and the soup has the aroma of herbs and pepper... Fellow classmate Geng, I must take you there to try one time."

It was seriously amusing to see Geng Xiaoxing's face when she was forced to throw up her white flag.

As Gu Sheng nibbled on her rice ball, one bite after another and imagined her friend lying in bed, wrestling with herself on whether or not to get up and rush to the cafeteria to be the first person in line for breakfast, she felt this world was truly so wonderful.

The resentment she had felt just a moment ago from being forcefully dragged into the YY room to discuss singing for some anniversary celebration had suddenly vanished like smoke into air, you know?

"Gu Sheng, I hate you..." Geng Xiaoxing's voice already had the hint of sobs in it.

She laughed in reply. Biting into her rice ball again, she answered in a voice muffled by food, "It honestly tastes really good."

Geng Xiaoxing was silent.

She thought, it was about enough now and she could let it go at that so that when she got back to school, she would not be hunted down to be killed. Right as she was about to say that she was going to exit YY now, a very clear voice with a hint of laughter in it unexpectedly started speaking. “That is actually a well-known Hakka[3] dish from Guangdong. If you have time, it’s actually quite convenient to make at home.”

It was a man’s voice.

Moreover, it was absolutely a male voice that, the instant it was heard, any girl would be done for.

But most importantly, Gu Sheng recognized that voice...

Qiang Qing Ci.

The leading artist of the Wanmei [Perfect] Voice Acting Group, Qiang Qing Ci.

Gu Sheng was completely dumbstruck.

She stared unbelievably at the list of online users in the room.

There was only “Sheng Sheng Man,” “Geng Xiaoxing,” and “Qiang Qing Ci.”

If she was not mistaken, it was Qiang Qing Ci. It really was Qiang Qing Ci.

The most gorgeous voice in the commercial field of voice acting, famous for many years now but yet people still could not guess the age of the person behind it. His fan’s most enthusiastic discussions were regarding each year, how many online video game promotional videos or leading roles in ancient television dramas would specify that they wanted him to do the dubbing and how many advertisements for commercial brands had already set that he was to be the appointed voice talent.

Seeing that this was Gu Sheng’s personal channel in YY, she really could not hazard a guess at why this sama[4], whose presence would surely cause all ‘voice lovers[5]’ to go wild with fervor, would enter this chat room in the early morning when the sky had just lit with light.



Furthermore, it was obvious he had been listening in for a while already; otherwise, how would he know she had been talking about pork stomach and chicken hot pot?

But by unlucky coincidence, the bus entered a tunnel and her internet reception was so poor she was not able to get her voice function to work.

She could not even greet him.

The most infuriating part was, Geng Xiaoxing was not saying anything either, making him seem as if he was just talking to himself.

“It is actually not that hard to make, but it will require some time. Plus, cleaning the pork stomach can be a bit bothersome.” Qiang Qing Ci sounded as if he had just awoken. What does it mean when you say a voice possesses screen presence, like the feel of a drama? This was it.

Gu Sheng could sense that he had accidentally heard all this, conveniently joined the conversation, and just started talking.

And he did not care whether there was anyone listening on this channel.

“Try to have as many of the ingredients readily available as possible. They have great health benefits anyway. I remember it has red dates, poor man’s ginseng, scented Solomon’s seal, goji berry, star anise, bay leaves, and Chinese cinnamon. The rest are just common household spices, salt, and chicken bouillon. Of course, you can’t forget cooking wine and ginger.”

Qing Qing Ci said a few more things along the lines that the chicken should be placed in the pork stomach, sealed up using toothpicks, and then put to simmer slowly over low heat...

Because of the poor reception, his voice was cutting in and out. She listened intently.

Gu Sheng had listened to his earlier works from a few years ago, and like herself, he had a preference for ancient style work.

His ancient style vocalization was extremely charming, but right now,

he was clearly using his natural voice.

It was early morning, several degrees below zero, and because of the temperature difference between the bus interior and outdoors, the glass windows had fogged up with a thin layer of condensation. But as she listened to him unhurriedly describing the recipe like this, it was almost as if she was sitting around the fire on a warm night. She unexpectedly had a feeling of peace and security, where there was no need for her to think about anything at all.

This was the amazing allure of voice. Only a voice lover could truly appreciate it.

As the bus drove out of the tunnel, the name “Qiang Qing Ci” suddenly disappeared.

It was likely because there had been no sort of interaction for such a long time so he exited the room.

However, the person who had inexplicably exited the room earlier, Geng Xiaoxing all of a sudden called her on her phone. “Just now, one of the aunties came to inspect the cleanliness of the dorm. I forgot to tell you. Continue what you were saying. That pork stomach and chicken broth or something.”

Gu Sheng was still in a bit of disbelief that the voice in YY a moment ago had been real. “So, all this time, you didn’t hear Qiang Qing Ci speak at all?”

“Qiang Qing Ci? What’s that?”

Gu Sheng could not help silently scorning her. “Celebrity in professional voice acting, Qiang Qing Ci. Wanmei Group’s leading voice artist.”

“Pronunciation sounds really weird,” Geng Xiaoxing said. “You dubbers and cover singers all have such weird and wacky names. You can’t even remember them..... But speaking of that Wanmei Voice Acting Group, I think our webmaster invited them for our site. He said for our website’s celebration, we’re going to open a YY channel too, and to celebrate, he

deliberately invited that dubbing group..... Send me his name, and I'll check to see if he'll be there."

"He probably won't be there... He mainly does voice work for commercial projects now. It's rare that he does work just for fun[6]."

This sama was the archetype of an artiste who had gone into seclusion for a long time... Just now... Just now most certainly was some sort of freak incident.

"Didn't you say this sama is their leading artist?" Gu Xiaoxing sniggered. "I don't believe we can't get him to come."

Gu Sheng completely did not think they would be able to successfully invite him, but still holding hope for some luck, she sent his name over: Qiang Qing Ci. The first word is pronounced as "qiāng[7]." It's the name of a type of color. Remember, so you don't embarrass yourself.

\*

[1] A Chinese website for online shopping.

[2] These are all names of restaurant chains in China that specialize in hot pot. In order, they are 海底捞, 留一手, 小肥羊.

[3] Hakka people have origins in southeastern China. Their cuisine places emphasis on texture and is known to be outwardly simple but delicious.

[4] Sama is a word of Japanese origin. It is a very respectful form of address to refer to people of significantly higher rank than oneself. It is often translated into Chinese as 大人 or 'DaRen,' which we shall see later in the story is what the highly respected artists in the online entertainment circle are addressed as. Hence, they are also referred to as sama.

[5] Orig. 声控 'sheng kong'. Literally means 'sound controlled.' In Chinese slang, to say you are 'XX 控' or 'XX controlled' means that you really like XX. To be a 'sheng kong' means that you love gorgeous voices. I'm going to translate 'sheng kong' as 'voice lover.'

[6] Orig. 玩票 ‘wan piao.’ In this context, when a professional artist does something ‘wan piao,’ he/she is doing it without concern for wage or remuneration but for other purposes, such as fans’ entertainment.

[7] Orig. 锖. The color of a mineral.

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Additional comments:

YY caused me a lot of confusion when I was first reading this novel. It’s probably because we really don’t have anything equivalent to it in our English-speaking world. Here’s a summary of what I’ve learned about it:

YY.com is a voice and video service offered to users. Each user can have their own personal channel, which is known by a string of numbers, and can be used for small group chats in a virtual room, like Gu Sheng in this prologue. However, YY is designed for large-scale, real-time communication that, as far as I know, does not have an equivalent in the English-speaking world. A single virtual room can host tens of thousands of users at once, all listening and communicating in real-time – like a virtual stadium. YY is used from things like communication during gaming to online concerts to virtual classrooms. The music business is a large part of YY, and this is what we will see it mostly used for in the novel. Fans can buy virtual gifts and give them to their favourite artist during a performance. Performers also receive virtual roses from their fans, and these roses can be traded in for cold, hard cash.

Edit: Hanny noticed that there is now a [global.yy.com](http://global.yy.com) site. It looks like YY is branching out of China and going international. This site only launched late in 2013, so time will tell if it’ll catch on. I haven’t had a chance to browse through this English version of YY but go ahead and look around. It might give you a better idea of what our characters will be doing in the novel.

# Chapter 1: Snow Peas Stuffed with Shrimp Paste

When the three names, “Qiang Qing Ci,” “Jue Mei Sha Yi,” and “Feng Ya Song” ended up actually being used in all the promotional work, Geng Xiaoxing’s dauntless perseverance and determination in getting Wanmei’s top three names, especially “Qiang Qing Ci,” had Gu Sheng in complete reverence.

Then, Gu Sheng heard the real reason and finally understand that the girl was just a lucky devil.

Wanmei’s anniversary celebration and Geng Xiaoxing’s website’s anniversary celebration coincidentally happened to fall on the same day. Wanmei’s anniversary celebration was a huge event. All of their CVs[1] would make an appearance, regardless of whether they were an old or new artiste with the group, and would participate in the program. Supposedly, Qiang Qing Ci had heard there would be a few cover singers of ancient style songs present, so he suggested doing a storyline song[2] and including a video and radio drama to go with it. When Gu Sheng heard this news, her heart stopped beating for several seconds. If Qiang Qing Ci could deliver the spoken lines, she could not even imagine how much better the storyline song would be.

As an amateur cover singer, this was a great temptation.

However, while she was still letting her imagination roam, Geng Xiaoxing very inconsiderately added, the person speaking the monologue for the storyline song was not him but rather, Wanmei’s boss and leader, Jue Mei Sha Yi [Perfectly Beautiful Killing Intent]. Only then did Gu Sheng calm down slightly.

But, Jue Mei Sha Yi also had an extremely captivating voice!

If one was to disregard personal preferences and taste, he and Qiang Qing Ci could evenly divide and share the CV world. Unfortunately, Jue Mei was too easily approachable, making Qiang Qing Ci’s low profile

approach actually the greatest part of his appeal.

Since she had several small things to take care of at home lately, Gu Sheng was not living on campus at the moment. As a result, she was late by a full half an hour for the first planning meeting at eight o'clock that evening. Fortunately, her part did not require her to worry at all. They had someone for directing, planning, writing lyrics, marketing... Basically anything that might be required, they had it fulfilled. In these early stages, she was there purely for the sake of it.

When she entered the room, she could hear one of the three big names, Feng Ya Song [Elegant Ode], speaking. His voice had a natural laughter in it. "As for me, my time is the most free. Jue Mei and Qiang Qing Ci are the hard ones to gauge."

"Me?" Jue Mei answered. "I don't have much time for 'PIA-ing script[3]'. Should be no problem if I just record my lines myself."

"Don't you have the lines in the storyline song?"

"Lines?" Jue Mei seemed puzzled. "Who's singing?"

"This..." Geng Xiaoxing's voice was surprisingly soft and girly. "We have several candidates, but a decision hasn't been made yet."

Gu Sheng was tidying her desk while she listened to Geng Xiaoxing speak.

She was mildly suspicious about Geng Xiaoxing's tone of voice. What was going on with that kid? Where was her usual domineering and aggressive quality?

She had not turned on her microphone and merely listened in as everyone discussed.

The whole time, she did not hear Qiang Qing Ci's voice amongst them. Well, DaRen[4] should be really busy. He probably left for a moment.

"Someone just arrived?"

All of a sudden, a voice spoke in a low, unhurried tone. It was a little unclear and muffled, as if eating something. But it was precisely that

indistinct quality that made it overwhelmingly delightful and melted the soul.

Luckily, today's meeting was for work and therefore, besides the dozen or so people present, there were no fans.

Otherwise... probably... the text screen would have been "scrubbed[5]" so much and been scrolling down insanely with enough love declarations to topple mountains and overturn seas.

One must know that for the last three years, Qiang Qing Ci had not participated in Wanmei's anniversary celebration. So much time had passed. For this year's celebration, there was no doubt that the online numbers would surpass 40,000, and it was certain a new record would be set.

Feng Ya Song very quickly jumped in with a comment. "Oh! It turns out our Toupai[6] is actually here. An hour and forty-seven minutes has passed. Why are you suddenly speaking up now?"

Qiang Qing Ci gave a little "mm" and said, "I've been here the whole time. But I'm not talking to you right now. Get off your mike."

Feng Ya Song was very obedient and instantly went silent.

Even this DaRen was quiet now; naturally, no one else dared to open their mouths.

"Sheng Sheng Man?" Qiang Qing Ci seemed as if he was thinking about something as he spoke her name.

Gu Sheng was dazed for a few seconds before quickly pressing F2. "I'm here."

"Sheng Sheng? He's talking to you." Geng Xiaoxing nervously reminded.

"I'm here," she said again, puzzled

"Sheng Sheng? Not here?"

"Here....." She was completely perplexed.

"I'm guessing she went to go eat something. That chowhound....." Geng

Xiaoxing laughed awkwardly.

.....

Gu Sheng was honestly so embarrassed she could just die. After a quick inspection, she realized she had only concerned herself with pressing F2 and had forgotten to turn on her microphone. She hurriedly flipped it on, cleared her throat, and said, "Sorry... I forgot to turn on my mike. I'm here."

"The pork stomach and chicken soup dish I taught you to make, have you tried it yet?" Qiang Qing Ci asked. No thought at all that mentioning this might be out of place of any sort.

"Uh... not yet..." Gu Sheng was feeling as if this was rather unimaginably weird, but she still answered honestly, "Haven't had the chance yet."

Qiang Qing Ci gave an indifferent "oh."

And then, there was an awkward silence.

Gu Sheng contemplated briefly and thought that Qiang Qing Ci must be a little displeased. After all, he had been so sincere in teaching her the cooking method last time, but she had ignored him. It was rather rude.

She carefully deliberated for three seconds before holding down the F2 button again. "Thank you Qiang Qing Ci DaRen for your coaching..." She paused briefly and then added, "I will definitely follow your instructions another day and try making it."

Gu Sheng's tone was proper and serious.

But there was still that uncomfortable silence. It was to the point that she nearly thought that she had lost her internet connection.

"Ahem, ahem... He's not here right now....." Jue Mei Sha Yi very kindly spoke up. With a hint of puzzlement as well as a suggestive overtone, he asked, "But I find it strange. You two knew each other before? I've never heard him mention it..."

Everyone knew that Jue Mei Sha Yi and Qiang Qing Ci were friends in



real life.

So if Jue Mei Sha Yi would say that, then that made that awkward, pause-riddled conversation very out of the ordinary.

As for what specifically was out of the ordinary about it, everyone, of course, had their own version of a story that was rapidly unfolding in their minds. For example, how a certain cover singer, so unknown you could not get any more unknown than her, was “hugging the thigh[7]” of a certain leading artist of Wanmei, who had been hiding off the radar for so long ... and even...

“Let’s continue... continue...” Geng Xiaoxing finally could not take it anymore and jumped in to help out her friend. “Jue Mei DaRen, we were talking about the spoken lines in the storyline song...”

“Ah, the spoken lines. Right. Lines.” Using a very intense, manly tone, Jue Mei lowered his voice and asked, “Do you think I would be able to do it? Hm? Geng Xiaoxing.”

“A-... able. Very able.”

Gu Sheng could hear the change of tone in Geng Xiaoxing’s voice.

As her roommate and confidante of four years already, where the head of one of their beds was snug up against the head of the other person’s bed, and also the one who would continue this sleeping arrangement with her for the next three years of graduate studies, Gu Sheng very sensitively sniffed out that this girl’s heart had been moved because of a voice.

She never would have thought that this person, who had never really paid much attention to the online voice acting world, would actually become a downright voice lover.

And moreover, she was the type of voice lover that, once she became obsessed, was beyond redemption and was heading straight for falling hard in the heart.

After listening for a while, Gu Sheng went to the kitchen and got the instant noodles her mom had just made for a late night snack. Glancing again at her computer, she noticed Qiang Qing Ci had private messaged

her: I forgot to mention that day, pork stomach and chicken soup is also called Phoenix Reincarnated.

Gu Sheng hastily set down her chopsticks and typed speedily on her keyboard: Thanks, thanks.

After she sent it, she quickly followed up and sent a ^\_^

Qiang Qing Ci: No problem. I saw your name and it made me think of a nice dish I ate yesterday.

Gu Sheng stared at her own instant noodles. She had a feeling she was going to be facing a situation where her midnight snack would be tasteless.

She swiftly replied: What was it? ^\_^

Qiang Qing Ci: Snow peas stuffed with shrimp paste.

Gu Sheng: Sounds so good...

Qiang Qing Ci: I tried making it once. Not difficult.

Gu Sheng: Really?

Her heart was bleeding. It's past eleven o'clock at night. Toupai DaRen, what are you trying to do?.....

There was a long moment of silence.

The chat room was still buzzing with activity as everyone was starting into the gossip that came after proper business was done. Those who had participated in the discussion had, in a flash, all transformed back into fans and were starting to surround Jue Mei Sha Yi and Feng Ya Song, asking question after question. For instance, they asked questions about Wanmei's next event, or Jue Mei Sha Yi's birthday party, or Feng Ya Song's latest drama which had just released...

Gu Sheng had just picked up her chopsticks when she saw the few paragraphs of text Qiang Qing Ci sent over:

The main thing is the shrimp paste, which is a little bit troublesome to make. Take several hundred grams of fresh shrimp and mince, both

horizontally and lengthwise, until it becomes a paste. Add boiled water that has been soaked with scallions and ginger, cooking wine, salt, MSG, and white pepper. Mix together. Stir in egg whites. Lastly, add a touch of sesame oil. Refrigerate for 1-2 hours.

Slice open the snow peas. Fill with the shrimp paste. Steam until fully cooked.

Finally, pour some Thai sweet chili sauce over them. The texture of the shrimp paste is really nice. It has the fresh sweetness of the snow peas. The taste is really quite good.

So serious with his explanation...

The channel was still bustling with excitement. After Gu Sheng stared at her bowl for a few seconds, she quickly typed off a “Thank you, DaRen,” and also added several smiley faces behind it before grabbing her bowl and running to the kitchen. “Mom! Did you guys have any leftovers from dinner, like meat or shrimp? Or anything will do. If there really is nothing, you can give me an egg to add into my food...”

\*

[1] Short for “character voice.” This term originated from Japan to describe professional dubbers and is equivalent to the western world’s “VA,” which is short for voice actor.

[2] 剧情歌 “ju qing ge.” A “storyline song” is one that contains spoken lines, monologue or dialogue, embedded within the song itself. As the name implies, the lyrics of such songs usually have a rich storyline.

[3] Orig. 拍戏. From what I understand from my research, the main gist of this is, CVs get together (often virtually, through some sort of online medium), and together, they read through a script with the proper emotion, as opposed to reading their lines alone and sending it in. Traditionally, a director is present to provide feedback. However, sometimes, this rehearsal of voices ends up being used directly in the final product (usually a radio drama or something along those lines). The name “拍戏” is meant to mean 拍戏, which means to perform/make a drama/movie/script. “PIA” is actually an onomatopoeia (sound word) for

the first character 拍, which when written alone, means to tap/clap/beat/slap/etc, and is used in place of that character. Hence, when you see “PIA script,” you can think of it as “perform script.”

[4] Orig. 大人. Literally meaning “big person.” A respectful form of address to a person of authority. In this case, the big names in the online entertainment circle are addressed as “DaRen.”

[5] Orig. 刷屏 ‘shua ping.’ Literally ‘scrub/brush screen.’ Slang used online. When a screen is being “scrubbed,” it is scrolling down quickly because so many comments are coming in that the screen is continuously moving to keep up.

[6] Orig. 头牌 ‘Toupai.’ Nickname for Qiang Qing Ci. This word means “leading actor/singer/performer” or “star” or “headliner performer” i.e. the biggest name and biggest crowd-drawer.

[7] Orig. 抱大腿. In the entertainment circle, to ‘hug someone’s thigh’ is to use another person’s popularity to help you rise up and increase your own fame.

# Chapter 2: Yuxiang-Flavored Thousand Layer Eggplant

It was New Year's holidays.

For three full days, Gu Sheng was conscripted by her family. During the day, she needed to look after their family's little grocery store, and at night after closing, she still needed to do inventory. But even so, Geng Xiaoxing still did not let her off the hook and required that she be present promptly every night at 10:30 until 1:00 in the morning when it ended.

The first two days, because both Jue Mei and Qiang Qing Ci had personal commitments, neither of them was present.

It was the last day of the holidays and also the first day of rehearsal.

To enhance the promotion of the event as well as feed all of Wanmei's fans' appetites, Jue Mei Sha Yi announced that the first rehearsal would be conducted on Wanmei's official channel and the event would be made public.

Naturally, the whole setting was not much different from a tea party.

By the time Gu Sheng arrived home, the screen was already deluged with countless comments. There were endless numbers of people leaving all sorts of shrieking or starry-eyed emoticons and symbols. Jue Mei Sha Yi and Feng Ya Song had just released a drama, and now they were on YY engaging in amusing banter.

Her eyes swept across quickly. Qiang Qing Ci was not present. This leading artist's whereabouts were truly impossible to determine.

Because all three of Wanmei's top stars were making an appearance at the event, in the end, it was decided that they would all have a part in voicing the lines in the storyline song. And because of the fame of Wanmei and its leading artist, Qiang Qing Ci, the lyricist actually submitted a draft for the song in only two days.

She looked over the lines for each of those three as well as a few of the

new artistes in Wanmei and was very pleased to discover that the lyricist, like herself, loved Qiang Qing Ci's voice the most. The most beautiful, artistic, and alluring lines were devoted to him.

"These lines are so 'shou[1].'" Feng Ya Song sighed softly. "Why is it, every time I cross paths with you, dear group leader, I have to be shou? And it has to be that warm and gentle but actually secretly resentful type of shou."

Gu Sheng skimmed through Feng Ya Song's lines and could not help letting out giggle.

" 'The horn's call trembles, the night is deep. For fear someone should inquire, tears are swallowed and joy is put on...' " Feng Ya Song recited slowly. He suddenly changed his lines and gently added at the end, "Jue Mei, may I ask you a question?"

"Huh?" Jue Mei Sha Yi said. "Sure, ask."

Feng Ya Song deliberately paused for several seconds.

And in those few seconds, there were already several hundred comments: "Yes, he did love you!" "Truly did love you!" "You don't even need to ask. You guys are the official couple!" "Be together!" "Absolutely, be together! No explanation needed!"..... The screen continued its nonstop scrolling because of all the comments. Gu Sheng was nearly dying from laughter as she read all these. These two men, one had an unruly and unfettered image while the other often put on the appearance of being wronged and misunderstood. They were indeed made for each other as Wanmei's number one "official couple."

It was a common occurrence for these CVs to be paired back and forth with one another.

But unfortunately, as the leading artiste, Qiang Qing Ci did not have any official pairing or rumours. This was utterly due to the simple self-introduction he gave when he first joined Wanmei: "I'm Qiang Qing Ci. Um, I'm straight."

A very prim and serious self-introduction.

And then, coupled with the fact that Toupai DaRen had a valiant fan base, no one dared to pair him up with any man.

Seeing that the screen was being spammed so violently, Feng Ya Song finally could not contain himself any longer and decided to put a stop to this.

“Eh? All of you, don’t get the wrong idea...” Feng Ya Song was unable to hold back his laughter. “I wanted to ask, where has our Toupai DaRen gone?”

“Qiang Qing Ci?” Jue Mei Sha Yi chuckled. “If he knew that you called him Toupai, you’d be tossed into the pool and used as a specimen of some sort.”

Feng Ya Song burst out in laughter.

The two’s opening dialogue to warm up the crowd could now be considered over.

After business was complete, the channel became Wanmei’s site for its own activities, but all the workers of the website still did not exit the channel, including Geng Xiaoxing who very enthusiastically decided to listen to them PIA script.

Gu Sheng had originally planned to exit but was curious where Qiang Qing Ci could be as he still had not shown up yet.

She stayed but did not make any sound, listening in as these CVs joked around and made fun of one another.

“He’s now right beside me.” Jue Mei Sha Yi suddenly changed the topic after he came onto his microphone. He stressed that the “he” he was referring to was Qiang Qing Ci. “Your Qiang Qing Ci Sama’s computer suddenly broke down, so right now, the two of us are sharing the same mike.”

Gu Sheng could not help listening carefully.

Soon, Qiang Qing Ci’s voice spoke up. “I’m here. You guys continue.”

Now that Toupai had actually emerged, how could the fans let him off

so easily? Unending comments continued to spam the screen, asking Qiang Qing Ci to say something to console them for the pain of having waited several hours.

Jue Mei laughed, “It looks like, if you don’t say anything today, I’m going to have a hard time explaining this.”

Qiang Qing Ci’s tone sounded a little resigned. “I’m very tired today.”

Instantly, all the zealous fans transformed into gentle, loving little lambs and comments started pouring in nonstop. “DaRen, hurry and get some rest now!” “Listen, listen! Even our DaRen’s voice has changed. My heart is breaking. T T” “Jue Mei DaRen, please stop enslaving our Toupai. He is so deserving of pity. He already rushed back, and now he is being oppressed by you...”

Jue Mei burst out in amused laughter. “Such injustice! I haven’t even made you do anything yet, and I’ve already been scolded for ‘enslaving.’”

“Let me think.” Qiang Qing Ci also seemed to sense that it would not do if he continued in this way. After pondering for a moment, he said, “I tried a dish today and thought it was pretty good.”

Jue Mei could not hold back his curse, “Cr\*p!” and at the same time, Gu Sheng also instinctively lowered her head and glanced at the time.

Ugh. Twelve midnight. Toupai DaRen, you really do have an ability to attract vengeance upon yourself during the late-night hours.

Since the two of them were sharing a microphone, their voices sounded somewhat distant.

It was very easy to imagine those two men sitting facing each other as they spoke. Qiang Qing Ci said, “Let me go get a glass of water,” and then temporarily left the other male and female CVs to joke and poke fun at each other.

With a “hee hee,” Jue Mei said, “I’ll reveal this to you guys in private: he only likes to cook when he’s not a good mood.”

“Not in a good mood?” Over on Feng Ya Song’s side, there was the sound



of a bag of crackers being torn open. “That’s why he’s taking revenge on society as a whole?”

Wanmei Voice Acting Group’s assistant leader, Dou Dou Dou Bing [Bean Bean Bean Cake] also piped in resentfully, “I have to go find the auntie in the dorm to buy cup noodles from her. Wait for me. But remember, this part has to be recorded, and tomorrow, I will post it on the website. That guy doesn’t say anything for a hundred years, and the instant he does, he’s talking about food in the middle of the night. So annoying.”

Amidst everyone’s rants and joking, only Gu Sheng seemed to feel that she was somewhat used to this already. After all, this was already the third time he did this. Could it be... he had never done it in the past?

“This late at night, let’s talk about vegetarian dishes.” Qiang Qing Ci seemed to have finished drinking his water and was now back at the microphone speaking. “Yuxiang-flavored[2] thousand layer eggplant.”

Resting her chin in her palm, Gu Sheng could even imagine the taste of the yuxiang.

He truly sounded rather tired. His voice seemed to have somewhat deviated from his usual rich, gorgeous voice and was lighter and husky.

“It’s very simple. Mainly it consists of two parts: frying the eggplant and the ingredients for yuxiang seasoning.” While he spoke, he was entertained by the fans, who were ceaselessly spamming the screen with comments of how hungry they were. He gave a rare chuckle. “I only have time right now. Don’t want to listen? If you don’t want to listen, I’ll stop.”

The fans could not speak through their microphones, so, with love like tidewaters, they continued to inundate the screen with their comments. “No, don’t DaRen. (≥◇≤)” “(\*>\_\_\_\_<\*) ~Qiang Qing Ci Sama, I waited three hours for you before you finally came. Don’t go, ah.” “o(“)o DaRen, even if you talked about the most sumptuous banquet[3], I could still take it.....” “Hey, how come it’s all Toupai’s fans?! Feng Ya Song Sama, there are tens of thousands of ‘shou’ people in the world, but I only love you!!!!”

Gu Sheng was cackling with amusement.

“Alright, don’t try to keep everyone in suspense now. Hurry up and tell us, and after you’re done, you are going out with me to have a late-night snack,” Jue Mei pressed.

“Take two eggplants and slice them into thin layers. Put them into a pre-heated pan of oil and fry over low heat. When they are slightly softer than a French fry, you can pull them out.” Qiang Qing Ci carried on speaking at a steady pace, “Of course, if you like the crispiness of French fries, you could fry these a little longer.”

“I like it crispier,” Jue Mei threw in a comment.

“Then, panfry minced garlic and chopped chili peppers in the oil to get the aroma out first. Add the eggplant slices. After that, it’s quite simple. Remember these ingredients: light soy sauce, ground pepper, sugar, chicken bouillon, sticky broad bean paste [doubanjiang], vinegar, cooking wine. Stir fry all of these with the eggplant on high heat. Lastly, add peanuts and chopped green onions. Stir fry again rapidly and then immediately remove from the pan.”

“Mm-hmm... If the peanuts are fried too long, they’ll get soggy...” Jue Mei painfully tried to work with him.

Qiang Qing Ci answered seriously, “I suppose they would.”

Gu Sheng’s stomach was clearly a little unhappy right now... The feeling of longing for good food suddenly came coursing over her, swallowing all her ability to reason. She was debating whether to go to the kitchen or just head straight downstairs to see if there was any chow mein or stir-fried rice noodles or other similar street-side foods to buy. While she was still battling within herself on what to do, a private chat box from Qiang Qing Ci suddenly popped up: You there?

Gu Sheng hastily typed a reply: I’m here! O(∩\_∩)O

Qiang Qi Ci: This is a vegetarian dish. It is very suitable for girls.

Gu Sheng: Okay! cupped fist! I’ll be sure to try another day!

Qiang Qing Ci: Okay. Going now. See you next time.

See you next time..... See you next time?!

Gu Sheng suddenly felt there was a need for her to stockpile all different sorts of dried pork, beef jerky, even canned luncheon meats, and other stuff along those lines before she dared again to meet with him – the one with the splendidly gorgeous and captivating voice and who was also an expert in all different types of recipes – Qiang Qing Ci DaRen...

\*

[1] 受 “shou.” In boy love fiction, the “shou,” which literally means “receiver,” would be the person taking on the more stereotypically “feminine” or “wife” role in a male-male relationship. However, it can be also be used to describe a male who, in terms of personality, speech, disposition, etc. is rather effeminate and passive.

[2] 鱼香 ‘yuxiang.’ Literally means ‘fish fragrance.’ In Chinese cuisine, yuxiang is a specific form of seasoning that usually contains garlic, scallion, ginger, vinegar, sugar, salt, chili peppers, etc. However, there is no fish or seafood in it.

[3] Orig. 满汉全席. ‘Manchurian and Han Banquet.’ A legendary banquet that took place in the palace in the Qing dynasty. It had 108 different dishes and took place over three days.

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Additional comments:

Let’s talk YY for a bit and how it works, in case anyone is confused. Administrators of a channel have a lot of control. A room can be “locked,” which means it is password-protected. Most of the planning for the anniversary celebration was held in a private chatroom, and only those involved in the planning process had the password.

In this chapter, the rehearsal was made into a public event and hence, they used a chatroom that was not password-protected. Anyone could enter it and listen in. However, admins have control over who has “speaking rights” in the room. In this event, normal fans did not have speaking rights and their microphones would not register, but they were

allowed to type comments.

# Chapter 3: Clear Noodles in Beef Curry Soup (1)

It was the last day of the New Year holiday.

Mom and Dad had gone to Grandma's[1] house. It was ten o'clock by the time Gu Sheng arrived at the grocery store to help her cousin[2] with closing and told him she had other activities that night. Her cousin was a guy who was completely unfamiliar with the things of the 2-D world[3], except for playing Sword 3[4], and really could not comprehend this lifestyle in which everyday, she would lock herself in her room and babble away alone, or the instant she stepped through the door, she would go hang out with a bunch of weird software and tune away at its sounds continuously.

Gu Sheng could not be bothered to explain and got ready to add up the total sales for the day.

She had just opened up the cash register when she heard a "ding dong" sound signaling an unexpected customer. It was a young man dressed in a black down jacket and jeans. Without saying anything, he walked in and stepped around the boxes that Cousin had just moved there to block additional customers from coming in. He was wearing black gloves, and now he removed, stuffed them in his pocket, and grabbed a bottle of mineral water from the cooler.

Gu Sheng's dog that she had brought from home enthusiastically ran over and looked over this stranger.

She stared blankly at Cousin. Normally, at least seven or eight boxes were used to block the door, but just now, Cousin had been so preoccupied with talking to her that he had only moved two. It was not unreasonable, therefore, that this person would think they were still open for business. Cousin looked on helplessly as well and addressed the man, who was half a head taller than him. "We're closed now. Would you be able to hurry and bring your things over to checkout?" When he finished speaking, he reached over and with a bang, closed the cash register in

front of Gu Sheng again.

The young man was very cooperative and hurriedly walked over to place the items in his hands on the counter: a bottle of water, a package of crackers, and a bottle of yogurt. The yogurt was the type that had large chunks of fruit.

“13.60 yuan.” Cousin speedily quoted the total price, took the bill of money, and returned the change.

Gu Sheng went to the side of the counter, picked up her dog, and glanced over curiously at this man who liked to drink yogurt with fruit chunks. A very clean-looking man. His eyes were surprisingly beautiful – outer corners turned up slightly, very large, and monolid.

Gu Sheng unconsciously recalled what was written in the physiognomy books she read. Boys with this type of eyes were usually very focused, and once they committed to something, they would not easily give it up. This was especially true in work and relationships, where they were particularly stubborn and persistent...

When she looked at him, he was putting the change back into his wallet. He suddenly seemed to think of something, and his brows creased together slightly, causing the outside of his eyes to turn upwards a bit more...

Realizing that she was examining him a little too closely, she quickly lowered her head and petted her dog.

The door let out another “ding dong” and slid open. The customer had left.

Each day, many people came and went through the grocery store, and because it was across the street from the district hospital, business was especially good. When she was watching the store, in just one day, she would see so many of this type of man that it was too numerous to count. But, this man alone caused Gu Sheng, an absolute voice lover, to suddenly imagine curiously what it would be like if he were to open his mouth and speak.

Of course, it was only a thought.

When she returned home, she discovered that Geng Xiaoxing was online in QQ[5].

Gu Sheng rapidly typed off a string of words and sent them over: Y(^\_^)Y Middle of the night and you're not sleeping. Which handsome guy are you waiting for?

Geng Xiaoxing: ^O^ Nope,nope. I'm listening to Jue Mei DaRen PIA script.

.....

Gu Sheng: Eh? Why is it I get this feeling that, when you type the words, Jue Mei, they are surrounded by a pink lace border?

Geng Xiaoxing: ..... I'm DaRen's diehard fan..... that's all.....

Gu Sheng: Oh. Which room?

Geng Xiaoxing speedily rattled off a string of numbers and gave her the password.

Gu Sheng told her to inform the people of her coming for her. However, when she entered the room, she took a quick sweep through and could not find Geng Xiaoxing's name. Finding this strange, she sent a Q message to Geng Xiaoxing: Where are you? Didn't see you.

Geng Xiaoxing: Shh... I'm listening in secret. I'm on QQ voice chat with Jue Mei, and he has secretly turned on the audio mixing and editing program on his computer for me to listen in on their voice acting group's training session for new people.....

.....

.....

Such professional terminology and shady actions, and Geng Xiaoxing actually understood it all.

Gu Sheng had a feeling she must have missed a lot of exciting things.

There were not too many people in the room. Gu Sheng listened for a

while and realized it was Wanmei’s own internal activity, along the lines of teaching new actors how to PIA script live. Jue Mei Sha Yi seemed to be in an especially good mood and was personally teaching the newbies how to find the emotion of a scene.

Some of those newbies seemed to have particularly bad cases of facial paralysis – no matter how they delivered the lines, there was still no feeling in them.

The name list did not include Qiang Qing Ci.

She recalled the string of words left behind on the screen when Qiang Qing Ci had said goodbye last time. It had seemed a tad peculiar. Her dog ran up to her and started whimpering and rubbing against her feet. Gu Sheng gleefully picked him up and asked in a low voice, “Chocolate, your tummy seems like it’s not feeling very well tonight. Did your grandmother secretly give you some strawberries to eat, huh?”

While she murmured to him, Chocolate kept rubbing back and forth against her naughtily.

In her headset, she could hear the conversations that were taking place during their break time.

“When Feng Ya Song first joined the entertainment circle, his trademark was his facial paralysis.” Jue Mei Sha Yi heaved a long sigh. “Why don’t you describe to the new people your history of how you used to get slapped around?”

Feng Ya Song let out a laugh. “I didn’t have any sense of feeling for the script. I’m guessing all of you haven’t really dated any girls?” While he spoke, there was a slight echo. Being the intelligent person that he was, he straightaway laughed, “Hey, whose audio mixing isn’t turned off?”

Gu Sheng instantly was delighted by this.

She quickly banged off a row of words to Geng Xiaoxing: The secret’s slipped out? Your affair’s been exposed...

Geng Xiaoxing: .....



“I’m using a different computer today.” Jue Mei gave a light cough. “Can’t turn it off.”

“Oh...” Feng Ya Song answered with a slight chortle. “And here I was wondering who was letting their own girl listen in in secret.’

Go back to talking about conveying the feeling,” Jue Mei chuckled.

“I’ll say, it’s really quite simple.” Feng Ya Song joked nonchalantly, “If you want to be able to convey feeling, go pester a few girls or boys. You’ll get ‘the feeling’ right away, especially in romance scenes.”

Everyone was being delightedly entertained as they listened.

Jue Mei, however, gave a lengthy sigh. “But according to what you’ve said, what’s Qiang Qing Ci, who’s never had a girlfriend before, to do? He’s a professional voice actor doing commercial projects. Specializes in the romantic, charming young noblemen, the deeply tender and loving type.”

Gu Sheng was stroking her dog’s fur right then, and her hand immediately paused. She thought she must have heard wrong.

She had been moved by Qiang Qing Ci’s roles countless times, especially in the hit period drama that had aired on the “Watermelon Channel[6].” That drama, she had “watched” completely with her eyes closed, just so she would only listen to the voices and not be distracted by the unattractive male lead.

With a “bah,” Feng Ya Song replied, “Forget about our Toupai. He has an innate sense of drama. We can’t compare.”

When they said this, the dozen or so newbies immediately grew excited.

One must know, more than half of the people present there had joined this voice acting group because of Qiang Qing Ci’s reputation.

The name, Wanmei, had been loved and famous for six or seven years because of Qiang Qing Ci.

In fact, when Wanmei’s artistes occasionally went to do dubbing for commercial projects, the instant they revealed that they were from

Wanmei Voice Acting Group, there would be a recording engineer who would laugh. “The one Qiang Qing Ci belongs to? Has that boy not retired from the online entertainment circle yet?”

Most of the well-known talents were freelancers. After all, who would want to be tied down by a non-commercial organization?

Gu Sheng was not certain for his reason behind it. However, her own biased speculation was that Toupai DaRen must have high moral integrity and, no matter how popular or famous he became, he did not forget his roots...

But now that Jue Mei Sha Yi had mentioned him, everyone started asking whether they could have a chance to hear Qiang Qing Ci DaRen give a live demonstration. Even if they needed to arrange for a very late time, they would definitely all still promptly show up. Jue Mei did not reply immediately and seemed to be considering.

In that brief moment of quiet, Gu Sheng did not dare even to breathe deeply as she also waited for the answer.

After all, the chance to hear him perform live for a non-commercial project had basically long since been non-existent...

“Sheng Sheng Man?” Qiang Qing Ci’s voice was suddenly in her headset.

She gave a start, and her heart started beating wildly.

He was actually here.

And he was using Jue Mei Sha Yi’s microphone again...

In a casual voice, Qiang Qing Ci asked her, “May I ‘hold’ you up onto the mike[7]?”

Very polite, very unexpected, and sounded very suggestively intimate.

She actually thought to use this adjective? Like she was a fresh newbie to the entertainment circle.

Wasn’t it very normal for an administrator to “hold” a person onto the mike and “hold” them to come off the mike? But, if all of a sudden, it was

your favorite voice that asked you this... Gu Sheng's ears were actually starting to burn up. She took a moment to scorn herself, and then putting on a relaxed and natural front, she typed off, "Sure."

She was "on mike" without a hitch.

It was quiet for a little while. Neither of them spoke.

"In fact, romance scenes are very simple." Qiang Qing Ci was somewhat more formal now, and his voice was already so ridiculously beautiful to listen to.

Gu Sheng did not know what sort of scene he wanted to act out with her.

She could only carefully watch the bulletin board. When she had observed other voice acting groups PIA script, the lines had all been posted on the bulletin board and people only needed to read what was written... But she just did not know, why did he choose her?

Then again, besides the newbies, there were only two other men here, so he really only could act it out with her.

Gu Sheng explained it in this way to herself.

But she still nervously drew in a deep breath... To ask a cover singer to voice out script was like trying to drive a duck up onto a perch to sit...

"Sheng Sheng Man?" Qiang Qing Ci suddenly addressed her.

"Hm?" Gu Sheng focused her gaze on the bulletin board. No lines there yet.

"I love you."

Dialogue that suddenly came out of nowhere.

Simple, straightforward, yet filled with a deep sense of tenderness and affection.

She was instantly stupefied. Fully and completely.

"Do you..." His voice resonated slightly, a gentle warmth that seemed to cast a spell. "... love me?"

“I...” She bit down on her lip, forcing herself to calm down. There was no script. How should she answer? Love? Not love? Love or not?

She struggled with herself for a few seconds before finally confessing, “Love..... I love... your voice.”

“Thank you,” Qiang Qing Ci answered her lightly. “I’ll ‘hold’ you off the mike now.”

He gave a laugh, returning to his usual aloof tone. “That’s the feeling you should have. Practice more. Contemplate on it some more.”

\*

[1] Orig. 外婆 ‘wai po.’ Mother’s mother.

[2] Orig. 表哥 ‘biao ge.’ An older, male cousin. Gu Sheng addresses this cousin only as “Biao Ge” throughout the novel, and he is never given a name by the author. I will just use “Cousin.”

[3] Orig.

二次元 ‘er ci yuan.’ The virtual world that exists in a “flat” or 2-D medium. This includes manga/anime and the characters within as well as the online world, its artistes, gaming, etc. and all the communication that takes place in it.

[4] Orig. 剑三, which is short for 新剑侠情缘叁Online ‘New Jian Xia Qing Yuan 3 Online.’ A popular online video game with an ancient setting. A drama of the same Chinese name and based on the game was filmed several years ago and called The Legend of Swordman or Sword Heroes Fate (featuring Nicholas Tse and Charlene Choi.)

[5] Tencent QQ, otherwise known as QQ, is an instant messaging service in China with features such as text messaging, file transfers, voice and video chats. Group chats on QQ are much smaller and personal, in general, than YY. I draw parallels to what you would use an MSN account to do.

[6] Orig. 西瓜台. This is either referring to Shanghai TV station or CCTV. I have found conflicting information. Several of China’s television

channels have been given nicknames after a fruit or vegetable because their logo resembles said food. For example, Hunan TV station, the station on which Bu Bu Jing Xin was aired is called the “Mango Channel.”

[7] The word used for “hold” is 抱. It’s the same word used for “hug/embrace” as well as “carry,” like how you would hold a baby. In YY, to “hold” someone up onto the mike means that an administrator allows someone, who originally did not have speaking rights in a room, to speak. It’s a simple right-click on their name and a check to add them to the list that allows their microphone to register in the room. Then, to “hold” or “carry” someone off the mike is to remove their speaking rights again.

\*

Additional comments:

After chatting via comments with Mel, I realized that this whole concept of an online entertainment circle may be a little bit foreign. To clarify, the CVs mentioned in this story are internet/online voice actors. That means their work mainly encompasses voice acting for projects that are released through an online medium (i.e. released for the 2-D world), such as radio dramas, online gaming, online videos, etc. That is completely different from (what I have translated as) commercial voice acting, which can include things like dubbing the voices for television dramas or television commercials. Toupai started out and made his big break in online voice acting and as a result, has a huge fan base in the 2-D world. However, he has generally moved out of 2-D world voice acting and is mainly doing commercial work. That is why his participation in Wanmei’s anniversary celebration, which is an online event, is such a big deal because it has been several years since he did any work in the 2-D world.

# Chapter 4: Clear Noodles in Beef Curry Soup (2)

With one hand covering her left earphone , Gu Sheng patted her own chest furiously with her other hand

It was still beating madly.

You definitely could not blame her for making a big deal out of nothing. This was the first time in her entire life someone had said “I love you” to her, and it was so sudden. On top of that, the voice that said it was, to her, the most gorgeous voice. Exhaling lightly, she quietly lamented, “Oh god, oh god, I’m going crazy, I’m going crazy, keep cool, keep cool...”

All of a sudden, she had a newfound respect for those female CVs who had recorded dialogue with him in his earlier years. How did they manage to bear it with all those different scripted lines of love declarations and confessions? If it were her, she would definitely only be able to send over lines that she recorded in solitude. She absolutely, absolutely would not be able to PIA script with him live.

Very shortly after, Qiang Qing Ci had to leave. Jue Mei teased him with a couple sentences and then left it at that.

Upon her return to school after the New Year, it was the two-week long period of final examinations.

Geng Xiaoxing and Gu Sheng did not dare let themselves get too crazily busy, so they agreed to come out of seclusion in two weeks. Everyday, the only things the two of them did were study and take exams, study and take exams. So in this way, they fumbled dazedly through until, on the fourteenth day, they stepped back into their dorm room. Finally, they felt as if their life had been re-powered up and they had been resurrected from the dead.

Gu Sheng logged into her own Weibo[1] to take care of her two hundred or so stray fans.

Being the little unknown cover singer that she was, her Weibo account

had been around for two years before her number of followers had reached that number. But she hadn't been online for two weeks and now she suddenly got notification that she had more than 2000 additional followers? How did that happen? Was Sina suddenly being kind and sending out zombie fans??

Terribly excited, Gu Sheng opened up the notification and delightedly flipped through them one by one. When she reached the last one, she was struck with shock.

Qiang Qing Ci.

She was afraid she was mistaken and deliberately moved her mouse to hover over the name. It had a yellow "V[2]." She wasn't mistaken. It was Toupai DaRen.

She did not know which day he had added her. Because of exams, she had not logged in for a full five days.

Gu Sheng thought through countless reasons, but in the end, she could not figure out why he was suddenly following her. She had followed his Weibo for a long time now and knew that it was rare that he would follow anyone. Besides the few CVs, scriptwriters, planners, and cover singers from his very early years who were now all considered old and senior in terms of rank, he did not even have any personal friends on his account. However, she did understand his intentions. Most fans liked to dig out gossip, and to avoid having his personal information exposed, he completely separated the 2-D world from his 3-D world[3] life.

So...that was why the number of people he followed, to date, had not exceeded one hundred, and furthermore, it had been more than a year since he had last added anyone.

So... those weren't actually zombie fans. Clearly, they were Toupai DaRen's diehard fans.

Gu Sheng stared blankly at her computer screen.

She had completely experienced the power of "hugging a thigh." All he did was start following you. He did not say or re-tweet or forward

anything, yet he instantly brought you more than 2000 fans. And right now, that number is still rising crazily.

Behind her, Geng Xiaoxing was cheerily munching on melon seeds and had dragged the wastebasket in front of herself. She was focused and meticulous in what she was doing. “Why are you all of sudden so quiet?”

Gu Sheng did not hear her.

Puzzled with this, Geng Xiaoxing poked her head over for a look. “Oh my gawd, you’ve been followed by Toupai.”

Gu Sheng’s awareness was brought back by the two characters, “Toupai,” and she turned around dazedly. “Yeah... He hasn’t followed anyone new for more than a year now. I’m scared of getting beat up by his fans.”

“Ai, I think you should close that to any comments to avoid having any nasty comments from people who might have fallen into the vinegar pot[4].”

Gu Sheng agreed and immediately followed through by shutting her Weibo post to any more comments.

She thought about it and still felt uneasy, so she flipped through her Weibo to make sure there were no boneheaded, tasteless, profane, or similar type content that could affect her image in Qiang Qing Ci Dada’s[5] eyes. Fortunately, she was not the type who liked to blather, and she rarely posted. Most of her posts were related to what she ate today, what she would eat tomorrow, and what she was planning on eating in the future...

A chowhound for sure, there was no doubt about that. But at least she was a chowhound with integrity, who had her own opinions, and who wasn’t boneheaded.

Breathing a silent sigh of relief, she began to flip through her private messages. One of them was from the head of the vocal department of her own music association. Basically.... um, he was asking her to try to apply for a yellow “V” to try to increase recognition for the association.



Gu Sheng, this little unknown, was also part of a little unknown association that had been established for only one month. The vocal and lyrics departments at least had a few people. Post-production and artistic design each had one person, and as for public communications, um... the association president himself took on that role.

She had been lucky enough to work with two well-known lyricists, so in the president's eyes, she was a sought after prize.

Pulling her thoughts away from the whole situation of being followed by Qiang Qing Ci, she forced herself to start filling out the online form to apply for "V" status. When everything was completed, she attached that stamped "verification of identity" document the association president had given her and sent off her application.

The webpage jumped to the next page and indicated that an invitation request could be sent to friends that had "V" status to act as a supplementary reference and verification.

Should these friends provide feedback, it would increase the chance of approval...

Mm.

Gu Sheng thought that sounded reasonable.

Her eyes quickly swept over the list of friend options the system had generated. They were all friends she had known in the past. One by one, she selected each of them until at last, she was only missing one. Hmm, missing one... She stared at the name, "Qiang Qing Ci," and struggled within herself for a long time.

To invite? Or not invite?

.....

Since... he was following her already, he shouldn't mind being a secondary reference, right?

She debated silently for a few seconds, then grit her teeth and selected him.

After she sent out the invitation, she started feeling anxious. Would this be too much of a bother to Toupai?

But before she had finished beating herself up over this, a private message arrived in her inbox.

When she opened it, she discovered it was actually Qiang Qing Ci's verification message..... And then it was followed up right away by another private message: I never thought that the first PM you'd send me would be one that asked me to be a supplementary verification.

Gu Sheng felt even more embarrassed after this, and with a rapid tap, tap, tap, she immediately typed off a row of characters: Biggest, biggest thank you, Qiang Qing Ci Dada, for your help!

Qiang Qing Ci: No problem.

Gu Sheng was stuck. Thinking for a bit, she sent a reply: DaRen, have you eaten clear noodles in beef curry soup before?

Qiang Qing Ci did not reply.

She felt slightly discouraged but nevertheless, she decided to work with his interests. Quickly, she typed off the dish that she cooked the best:

For the beef, first cut it into small pieces, rinse clean, then put in boiling water just to get rid of the impurities. Soak a handful of the clear noodles in cooled, pre-boiled (it has to be cold water, k). Then, in a stockpot, add water, beef, scallions, ginger, and bay leaves. Bring to a boil over high heat. Skim off any scum. Add cooking wine to get rid of any gaminess. After it has boiled, turn heat to low to allow it to stew slowly..... About two hours or so, then add some salt to taste.

Finally, strain out the beef and put it into a clear broth. Add curry powder and cook for 5 minutes.

Add the noodles in, bring it all to a boil, and then you're ready to eat.

Oh right. Don't forget to add cilantro. Tastes really good. This is my favorite soup.

After she sent the message, Gu Sheng thought, mm-hmm, it could be

considered a bit of a repayment to him.

Seeing that a long time had passed and still Qiang Qing Ci had not yet replied, she surmised that Toupai Da'ren must be busy. She was about to shut off her computer and go eat when a private message from him showed up again.

Qiang Qing Ci: This dish is one I'm actually really good at making.

Gu Sheng: .....

Qiang Qing Ci: Mm-hmm, it's true.

Gu Sheng: ..... Originally... I had wanted to repay you. I'll just have to collect a few more recipes and try again.

Qiang Qing Ci: Repay?

Gu Sheng: Y(^\_^)Y Of course. I troubled Toupai DaRen to personally be a supplementary reference for me. Of course I need to repay you.

Qiang Qing Ci: You really want to repay me?

His question back to her made Gu Sheng's heart start to beat like a little drum... DaRen wouldn't suggest some weird or tricky request, would he? But she had absolute faith in DaRen's character, so clenching her teeth, she sent back her answer: Uh huh! Cupped fist!

Qiang Qing Ci: Sing a song for me.

\*

[1] Orig. 微博. Literally meaning 'microblog,' Weibo is similar to Twitter and follows similar practices. The biggest microblogging service in China is offered by Sina, and its full name is Sina Weibo, although due to its popularity, "Weibo" usually directly refers to Sina Weibo.

[2] In Weibo, an account which has a yellow "V" next to the name indicates that this account has been authenticated by Weibo to indeed belong to the famous person of that name. For example, here is the Weibo account of the author of this novel, Mo Bao Fei Bao. Note the yellow "V." <http://www.weibo.com/mobaofeibao>

[3] Orig. 三次元 'san ci yuan.' As opposed to the 2-D world, which is the online world, the 3-D world can be thought of as real life and all that exists and happens within it.

[4] In Chinese, for someone to “eat vinegar” means that they are jealous. Here, Geng Xiaoxing’s comment is referring to any fans who were extremely jealous of Gu Sheng for being followed by Toupai.

[5] Orig. 大大. Literally, “big big.” In the online world, ‘dada’ is used to refer to someone who is highly skilled or capable.

# Chapter 5: Spicy Black Bean Clams

Gu Sheng: ..... Now?

Qiang Qing Ci: Now? Wait a sec.

.....

Gu Sheng felt Toupai DaRen must have misunderstood. She clearly was trying to ask him whether or not he wanted to listen right now, so how did it suddenly turn into her requesting if she could sing for him right now?..... Those were two entirely different concepts, k?!

There was someone in her dorm right now, too, and that person was the most nosy of them all, Geng Xiaoxing, k?!

Toupai, please don't do this...

Qiang Qing Ci very quickly sent back a chat room number.

Of course, she remembered this channel was his official channel number. Everyday, several hundred people would be online there. Even though it was often more than a month before he made an appearance, administrators would still play his recordings everyday and organize little events. It was completely a gathering place for hardcore fans, k?

Gu Sheng believed her sudden appearance there and the fact that she was going to sing for Qiang Qing Ci would definitely cause her to be crushed to death by all the gossip and rumours...

She sent off a resolute reply: DaRen, let's go to my room instead. (\*>\_\_\_\_<\*)'~

Qiang Qing Ci did not answer.

.....

Don't tell me he was gone already????

Gu Sheng wanted to cry. She turned around to glance at Geng Xiaoxing, who was completely engrossed in munching on her melon seeds... Turning back around silently, she logged into her YY account, and with resolve like a warrior heading to her death, she typed in Qiang Qing Ci's

room number. She had just entered the room when she saw countless comments spamming the screen. “Dada made a sudden appearance, ah!!!!” “What? What did you say?” “Dada is in a password-protected room, ah! Can’t get in! How to crack it?! How to crack it?!” “Chill... Dada must be waiting for someone...” “flip the table Who could make our DaRen wait?!...”

Just when she was about to flee from there, she was “carried” into a small room.

Inside the password-protected room, it was just she and Qiang Qing Ci. She swiftly typed a smiley face: Qiang Qing Ci Dada.

Although there was a smiley face, she still had the feeling she was going to be killed this time. The people outside this little room could not come in, but they could see who was inside... She forced herself not to imagine the consequences and to just focus on repaying him.

“You can speak now.” Qiang Qing Ci’s tone was very casual. “There is only you and me here.”

Gu Sheng’s head was “covered with black lines[1].” If she got on her microphone, Geng Xiaoxing would definitely jump up right away.

But, she came here to sing as repayment. She couldn’t just type the lyrics and not use her voice.

Gu Sheng turned around. “Hey, uh...”

“What?” Geng Xiaoxing answered without really thinking.

“I need to sing a song.”

“Sing then.” Geng Xiaoxing could not be bothered at all. “I’m used to it. Aren’t you a cover singer? You’re always taking advantage of any time there’s nobody else but us in the dorm to torture me.”

Gu Sheng wordlessly put on her headphones and then cleared her throat. “What would Dada like to listen to?”

“What’s your forte? Ancient style?”

“Mm-hmm. Ancient style.”

“ ‘Zi Gua Dong Nan Zhi’ [Hang Yourself on the Southeast Branch] then.”

“Hang Yourself on the Southeast Branch?.....” Gu Sheng felt despair, and she secretly peeked over at Geng Xiaoxing.

“Mm-hmm. Rather fun, that song is.”

“Alright... Let me look for the background music.”

Gu Sheng quickly shut off her microphone and turned her head back to look at Geng Xiaoxing again. “Hey, uh...”

“What?” Geng Xiaoxing gave her a weird look.

“I’ll be singing a senseless song. Don’t mind me.”

“What song?” Geng Xiaoxing was actually interested now.

“Hang Yourself on the Southeast Branch.”

“Pffft... You’re singing that for your own fans?”

“No... For Qiang Qing Ci Dada.”

“My gawd... Since when did you and Toupai get so close?.....” Geng Xiaoxing’s thoughts started wandering, and she began filling in details in her own mind.

Gu Sheng was worried about keeping Qiang Qing Ci waiting for too long, so she immediately downloaded the background music and lyrics from 5sing.

This wacky song that strung together lines from all sorts of poetry and songs was really bad for a person’s image. When she was ready, she felt as if her heart was starting to bleed and was scared that, once Toupai finished listening to her sing, he would be completely turned off by her. After all, from one perspective, Toupai was her favourite voice. How had things developed into this?

Did she really... have to “hang herself on the southeast branch?”

“Dada, I’m going to start now.” Gu Sheng felt a little dejected as she

started the background music.

[[[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HuWgAJrw\\_I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5HuWgAJrw_I)]]

Geng Xiaoxing, like a nosy old lady, walked right up behind her and started listening in like a second audience member. She did not really understand YY, but she still knew that two people hanging out alone in a room was absolutely comparable to a private date.

When she started singing the lines of “Hang Yourself on the Southeast Branch,” she clearly heard Qiang Qing Ci laugh out loud... He actually laughed out loud... She really wanted to burst into tears, but very professionally, she continued singing.

When she reached the end, she hastily shut off the music.

“Not bad.” Qiang Qing Ci concisely summarized, his tone laidback.

This was... his doting voice style that absolutely mesmerized his fans.

Gu Sheng exhaled very lightly. Oh gawd, oh gawd, stay calm, stay calm. Today, she was here to repay him. She needed to have a calm state of mind. Absolutely calm. She absolutely could not let herself get starry-eyed...

“Do you like to eat clam?” Qiang Qing Ci suddenly changed the subject.

“Yes. Qiang Qing Ci Dada, you like it, too?” Gu Sheng was striving hard to maintain her own image as she kept her voice steady.

“It’s ok.”

He gave a laugh.

Oh god... Gu Sheng put a hand on her chest.

The doting voice coupled with a laugh every now and then. Seriously, she was going to die on the spot... aah.

Who was going to come to save this voice lover?...

Feeling as if a hundred claws were scratching at her heart, she silently scorned herself. Geng Xiaoxing could not hear what was being said in her headset and could only see the pained expression on her face. Slightly



worried, she patted her on the shoulder and asked, “Little girl, have you been poisoned?”

Gu Sheng waved her off.

Not poisoned. She was obviously bewitched[2].

Fortunately, the settings had been set so that one could not speak freely without pressing the talk key, so Qiang Qing Ci did not hear what Geng Xiaoxing said.

Geng Xiaoxing’s lips pursed together in a pout. Not hearing the entire conversation was not very fun, so she walked back and continued nibbling her melon seeds by the wastebasket.

In the headset, Qiang Qing Ci was speaking leisurely. “But, there is one method of making them that I really like.”

“For clams?” Gu Sheng asked without really thinking.

However, after the question slipped out, she snapped out of her daze. Duh. Of course for clams. Weren’t they talking about clams the whole time?

“Mm.

“Spicy black bean clams. Have you eaten it before?”

“Yes...” Gu Sheng thought for a moment before continuing, “But I don’t eat spicy things often. Cover singer, you know. Have to protect my voice.”

Qiang Qing Ci chuckled.

Gu Sheng closed her eyes wordlessly, pretending she did not hear that doting and entrancing laugh.

“I eat spicy things often,” he said offhandedly.

“Well..... Dada, you’re talented.... Wait, no. It should be, you were born with a naturally nice voice, and even if you don’t protect it, it will be fine.”

It was obvious that God was playing favorites, you know?

“The method to make it is not difficult. It’s just handling everything that can be a bit of a bother.”

“Mm...”

“Soak the clams in lightly salted water for half an hour so they spit out any sand. Then, clean them and put into boiling water until they open.”

“Mm...”

Out of habit, Gu Sheng continued listening to him and even began to wonder whether she should record him for the later benefit of all the Qiang Qing Ci fans out there.

But she should ask for Qiang Qing Ci’s consent first, right? She hesitated, not daring to ask.

“Prepare two sets of ingredients. The first set is soy sauce, white pepper, cooking wine, MSG, and ‘high’ soup, and combine them all in a bowl. This is the sauce. The other set is cornstarch and water mixed to form a thickening slurry.”

“What is high soup?”

“High soup? There are many kinds. The most common type in home cooking is, when making chicken stock, to reserve some and use it in place of water when stir-frying dishes.”

“Got it...”

“After all the ingredients are ready, put a little oil in the pan. Add black beans and some minced garlic and sauté for a bit. Then add the white end of some scallions, sliced chili peppers, and chopped ginger and continue to sauté. After, pour in the clams and the sauce. Stir-fry over high heat. It has to be high heat, or else the clam meat will fall out.”

“Mm...”

“When the sauce has reduced down to about half, add the cornstarch mix. Stir-fry again, then add the green end of the scallions. Then remove from the pan.”

“Mm...”

On this end, all Geng Xiaoxing could hear was Gu Sheng’s unending string of “mm” but did not know what she was doing. So weird. She nosily

snuck a peek at the screen but there was nothing. Sigh.

Qiang Qing Ci seemed to have finished speaking.

Wait. They had already gotten to “remove from the pan” already. Of course he was finished speaking.

Gu Sheng very, very politely said, “I’ll remember. Thank you, Qiang Qing Ci Dada.”

His voice came through in the headset again.

First, there was a very light “mm,” and then he told her, “I need to go now. When will be the next time you sing for me?”

“Next time?” Gu Sheng blurted out.

“There’s no next time?” Qiang Qing Ci seemed to be pondering something.

“Uh...” His question in reply made Gu Sheng feel a little uncertain. Singing only one song did not seem sincere enough as a repayment? “Well then, the next time Dada you have time, feel free to come find me.”

“Alright. See you later.”

Qiang Qing Ci seemed to chuckle again, and then he swiftly exited the little chat room.

\*

[1] Slang. Often in cartoons, emoticons, etc, little lines are drawn over the head of the character to represent cold sweat that broke out from hearing or seeing something that caused awkward embarrassment and a complete loss over what to say or do in response. Hence, if you encounter this type of situation in real life, you can say that there are “black lines over your head.” In the absence of emoticons, sometimes you can see this represented by --||||

[2] Orig. 中蛊 ‘zhong gu.’ 蛊 or ‘gu’ is said to be a poisonous parasite of some sort that is deliberately placed by human means into a person, who becomes the host body. The parasite is controlled by the one who placed it into the host, and hence, the host is at the mercy and control of that

person, like he is under a “spell.”

\*

Additional comments:

Tehe! Did you listen to the entire song? I’ll confess that the first time I heard it, I shut it off almost right away. Not my cup of tea. But, do at least let yourself get to the rap part that starts around 1:22. LOL. Now you can see why Sheng Sheng would have “black lines over her head” when Toupai told her to sing this song. Melody (or lack thereof) aside, the lyrics of this song is actually quite amazing. It is composed entirely of random lines from several dozen ancient poems and strings them together so that it all makes sense, so much so that when this song came out, one of the worries was that it could mislead students into reciting poems incorrectly. The blue characters on the bottom of the Youtube video are the lyrics while the green characters on top state the poem from which the line was taken. Pretty amazing how many poems it references, huh? I’m not going to translate this song because (1) I’m not capable with all the ancient language used and (2) you would be sick of reading all the footnotes with the poem references. Plus, in the context of the story, the boppy melody and rap are the most important in realizing that Toupai was having a little fun with Sheng Sheng.

# Chapter 6: Sauteed Black Pepper “Little” Ribs (1)

Gu Sheng pulled off her headphones in despair. Soon, she was trembling with excitement as she started to carefully select songs, in case she would need them later. She chose, for example, songs that were not meaningless, had a limit to how embarrassing they were, or had a beautiful melody and lyrics... to try to rescue her image.

Next time, she needed to be more aggressive, to confidently and in a justified tone, tell Toupai Da'Ren, “Da'Ren, I am going to sing this song for you...”

After she had seven or eight BGMs (background music) prepared, she finally calmed down somewhat.

“Gu Sheng, what stage have you and Toupai progressed to?” Geng Xiaoxing’s tone was also calm as she asked.

“Huh?” The way Gu Sheng looked at her was like she was staring at a ghost.

“You guys locked yourselves together in a little room and had a private rendezvous. Aren’t you afraid his fans will take headshots at you?” Geng Xiaoxing shook her head and sighed lightly, “A tall tree attracts the wind[1] [criticism always follows the famous]. Low-profile. You guys totally need to keep a low-profile.”

She suspected that Geng Xiaoxing must have held those comments in for a long time. After finally getting the chance to say what she wanted to say, in an extremely delighting-in-someone-else’s-troubles manner, she kicked the wastebasket back to its original location, picked up her wallet, and headed out for dinner.

Gu Sheng thought for a minute, then glanced over her Weibo page again.

It pained her to do so, but she deleted the status, “Taking song requests” from her personal profile... After all, she was being followed by Toupai

Da'Ren, and she should at least leave him some face, mm-hmm. But, she honestly was just an unknown. And she honestly liked to sing. And there was honestly no one requesting her to sing. And she honestly wanted to “take song requests.”

In silence, she closed the webpage. Because she was being suspected of “hugging a thigh”, she pondered whether or not she should be more careful when requesting collaborations.

For Toupai's reputation, mm-hmm, Sheng Sheng Man, you had better exercise some restraint.

However, after this little episode, she and Qiang Qing Ci did not have much interaction.

Each year, the winter holidays were always accompanied by the Spring Festival[2] holidays.

Many of the people who had a part in the anniversary celebration did not have much time to be online after they had gone home for the holidays, or else their internet connection was too slow. As a result, they arranged to have one last internal meeting on February 1st at a specified time to finalize the program for the anniversary celebration.

Then, they would need to divide up the work amongst themselves and begin preparations.

Because it was nearing the Spring Festival, Gu Sheng's family grocery store would close especially early. Practically, once the sky grew dark, they would close up.

On little Lunar New Year[3], she deliberately went to help out with closing and by chance, happened to see an argument taking place across the road. Standing behind the glass door, she threw a few looks in that direction. Since the store was near the hospital, every now and then, disputes between doctors and patients could be seen, so she was accustomed to it. However, this time, she saw a familiar face. It was the young man who had bought the fruit chunk yogurt that night.

The reason why she noticed him was because he and the three others

with him had clearly become the target of attack. At the moment when Gu Sheng recognized him, someone had grabbed the clothes of the woman on his right. He reached over to block away the offender ... And while he was blocking, a punch landed on his face.

“Ah!” A cry escaped from Gu Sheng’s lips.

Right after, she heard a loud racket. Turning around, she saw several drinks had fallen and landed outside of the cooler.

“My god! ... Freak me out, will you?” Cousin bent over and began to pick the things up, all the while complaining, “I hate it when girls scream for no reason. It’s ridiculously painful on the ears. You think you’re one of those spirits on a haunted night?”

“I didn’t mean to...” Gu Sheng walked over to help him clean up, stuffing everything back into the cooler. When she looked back again to check on the situation in front of the hospital doors, the fight had already ended. The people who had caused the disturbance were still there, but the man and his companions had left already.

Gu Sheng reckoned, that man was probably one of the graduate students working at the hospital? Or something else?

Anyway, he was so young, he couldn’t be a doctor, right?

But he was rather gallant and heroic, the way he knew that he should protect the girl...

After silently praising him for a bit, she decided that the next time the young man came, she would definitely give him... a 12% discount. Mm-hmm.

February 1st was the third day of the new lunar year.

By the time the arranged time of 9:00 p.m. arrived, she had already gathered up her snacks into the living room. Duck tongue and tripe were the main foods with spicy peanuts and iced black tea on the side. Fully prepared, she went online and entered Wanmei’s chat room.

She had just stepped into the living room when her mom also came in

and asked about visiting relatives the following day, so she was delayed for some time. By the time she had finished talking and turned back around, she was surprised to find the comments spamming the screen had to do with her.

More accurately, everyone was gossiping like crazy.

“It’s Sheng Sheng Man @@ ~if there’s Sheng Sheng Man, then there will definitely be Toupai Dada!!” “What?!!! Where? Where is she?” “That one that one!..... why is sheng sheng man the orange horse[4]?!!!! aaaaah! someone come stab my eyes blind! hurry n stab my eyes blind!” “Calm down... Toupai and her... mm, you guys get it?...” “flip the tables Sheng Sheng Man, I won’t let this lie!” .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Gu Sheng was utterly flabbergasted.

She really wanted to say... Toupai was indeed going to be there, but he was there for actual business and had nothing to do with her, ah ah ah ah...

She debated for three seconds but, in the end, still gloomily entered the password-protected room.

The people in there had absolutely no idea that outside, there was so much ruckus it was about to overturn the heavens, and they were merely carrying out idle conversation. As usual, group leader, Jue Mei and Feng Ya Song were heading up the banter and the others would throw in the occasional comment.

Qiang Qing Ci did not say anything, but he was in the room.

Gu Sheng’s first reaction was, his computer was fixed now?

But she hastily realized her attention was much too focused on him, and she needed to be distracted.



“Let’s release something, like a pre-event warm-up,” Feng Ya Song suggested in a lazy tone. “Consider it a little perk for the fans. At the time of the actual anniversary celebration, we will then release the official storyline song.”

“Good idea,” Jue Mei Sha Yi agreed.

The assistant group leader, Dou Dou Dou Bing gave a laugh. “You’re the group leader, and I’m the assistant group leader, but what we say still doesn’t count. Three years have passed, and the highlight of the show is our Qiang Qing Ci Dada.”

In the headset, Geng Xiaoxing’s giggles could clearly be heard.

Soft and sweet... soft and sweet...

Gu Sheng felt, mm-hmm, it must be because of Jue Mei Sha Yi..... Although she still did not have hard evidence, if a girl who normally had the heart of a tomboy suddenly had a complete change in personality, there was no doubt then that something fishy was going on...

While she was still speculating, Qiang Qing Ci unexpectedly spoke, and he was saying her name. “Sheng Sheng?”

For some reason, it was just the “Man” on the end of her name that got left out..... But it seemed to give the wrong impression of being a little... um, like he was suspiciously intimate with her.

“Dada, I’m here,” she answered immediately.

“You like ancient style, I remember.”

“Mm-hmm.”

He seemed to ponder briefly before asking, “So, what’s your favourite song?”

“Hang Yourself on the Southeast Branch” instantly popped into her head... No way? Dada? You wouldn’t do that to me, would you? To take that and make it the pre-event release? She was lamenting inside, and her thoughts were in utter disorder. She thought carefully before replying, “I prefer ‘Jian Xiao Jiang Hu’ [Sword Cry in the Land of the Rivers and

Lakes].”

“ ‘Sword Cry?’ ”

His voice did not seem to be in its best condition today.

But, with the huskiness, it was actually rather sexy...

“Don’t tell me you don’t know it, eh?” Feng Ya Song prodded him with an indolent chuckle.

Qiang Qing Ci gave an “mm” and said, “I know it.”

“But this song has lots of covers already, and you would have to find many people... I think you would need six people to sing, plus one to deliver spoken lines? With anything that Wanmei produces, if there isn’t a superb line-up of people, we would be embarrassed to release it...”

“Indeed. To all of a sudden need to find so many people...” Jue Mei Sha Yi was hesitant as well.

Qiang Qing Ci did not seem to pay heed to their opinions.

Instead, he asked her, “Sheng Sheng? In your opinion, who do you think would be suitable?”

“Me?” Gu Sheng contemplated for a moment and assembled the cast list she loved the most. “Fei Shao [Young Master Fei], Ling Long Ti Tou [Exquisite; Clever], Mo Mo’er [Ink Ink],...” She listed off six of her favourite singers whom she thought would be suitable for this song, and at the very end, she said with certainty, “The monologue would have to be spoken by Qiang Qing Ci Dada.”

“Me?” Qiang Qing Ci gave a slight chuckle. “That won’t be difficult...”

“Yeah, you’re the only one that’s not difficult to get...” Gu Sheng sighed wistfully. All of a sudden, she felt she was completely out of line.

Hello?! Getting Qiang Qing Ci to deliver the lines was not difficult??!!

Good thing they were just in a private little room, k? If she had gone outside and said that, she would have been instantly flogged to death, k?...

“The ones you mentioned...” Qiang Qing Ci was contemplating.

Those people had all entered the online entertainment circle years ago, and most of them only held concerts now and did not accept new requests...

Some of them did not even bother to hold concerts and seemed to have disappeared altogether from the world, k?

He suddenly asked, "Dou Dou Dou Bing, what do you think?"

Dou Dou Dou Bing was surprisingly quiet for three seconds before she finally heaved a long, long sigh. With an extremely resentful tone, she told him frankly, "Toupai, I hate you..... Argh! Fine. Friend Sheng Sheng, thank you for your love and affirmation I am actually Mo Mo'er."

Gu Sheng was stunned.

She never would have thought, honestly never would have thought...

Never would have thought... that this respected senior was actually hiding out in Wanmei...

Dou Dou Dou Bing repeated again, "Qiang Qing Ci, I hate you," before grudgingly continuing. "The people you mentioned, I can arrange to get two of them. As for the remaining three, we will have to see whether they will give face to Qiang Qing Ci. However..." She coughed lightly a couple of times.

Feng Ya Song jumped in right away and carried on for her, "However, one of them, Ling Long Ti Tou, is Qiang Qing Ci's diehard fan. Diehard fan, you get it, right? Um, Sheng Sheng, you should think it through first. Are you really going to hand Qiang Qing Ci over to someone else?"

"Um..."

While this type of joking around in a YY room was really just casual banter...

But to be teased together with Qiang Qing Ci... She really...

She really was just incapable of responding nonchalantly or jesting and jeering with them..

"We don't need three." Qiang Qing Ci indifferently expressed his

disagreement. “Let Sheng Sheng sing one of the parts.”

Without even waiting for Gu Sheng’s response, Dou Dou Dou Bing and Feng Ya Song had already let out an astonished cry.

Feng Ya Song was gleeful. “Sheng Sheng, you’re going to be totally famous~”

Totally famous...?

Gu Sheng did not care whether she was going to be famous or not. All her attention was entirely, entirely, entirely, entirely on this cast list she loved the most. The best voices, the best speaker to deliver the monologue.

And then there was one more person... and it was her.

What was she feeling?

Totally like a singer who had just entered the preliminary rounds of a talent show and was being suddenly informed that she was about to collaborate on a song with Jacky Cheung, Jay Chou, Terry Lin Chih Hsuan..... etc, etc, and on top of that, Daniel Wu was going to deliver the speaking lines, k??!!

Gu Sheng kept bringing her drinking glass up to allow the icy cold to touch her face.

Oh my gawd, oh my gawd, crazy, going crazy, seriously going crazy...

\*

[1] 树大招风 “shu da zhao feng.” This idiom draws the analogy: like a tree that has grown tall and will naturally have wind that will rustle it, those who have fame or fortune will naturally attract criticism and attack.

[2] 春节 “Chun Jie.” The Spring Festival is the modern name used in China to refer to the Lunar New Year festival, which is a celebration that runs Lunar New Year’s Eve runs (and sometimes even earlier to the 15th day of the first lunar month.

[3] 小年夜 “xiao nian ye.” This could have various meanings, depending

on where in China one is. It could refer to the 23rd or 24th day of the twelfth lunar month or it could be the day before Lunar New Year's Eve.

[4] YY culture and terminology in China. YY has multiple classification levels that determines how much control a user has within a specific channel. Each level is assigned a different colour. However, the online slang term in Chinese for “ID” or “pseudonym” is 马甲, where the first character 马 is also the character for “horse.” Hence, as a short form, the levels are also referred to as “YY horses.” I will only list the first several levels, which are the ones that are mentioned in the story.

- Black: Official staff in YY.
- Purple: The owner and also founder of the channel. Has the highest authority in a particular channel, although that authority can be designated.
- Orange: Head channel manager. Second only to the purple horse and has basically the same administrative rights.
- Yellow: Channel administrator.
- etc.

It seems these “horse” levels are also used more casually to describe how important a person is. So, in this context, Gu Sheng being referred to as the “orange horse” is saying that people think she has “administrative rights” to Qiang Qing Ci.

\*

Updated February 2016:

This translation has been based on the very first online edition. That is the version that contains all the real-life songs that I have been linking to in Youtube. As some of you may be aware, the author went back and revised this novel to, for copyright reasons, remove most of the real-life songs and replace them with her own lyrics/songs. The published version of this novel which came out in May 2015 generally follows the revised

online edition, with some minor edits. Most of the complete versions you can find online are still the original edition. However, there was one continuity issue in the first edition. In that edition, the date for that internal meeting for the anniversary celebration was actually February 13th, so if you are following along with an online version and see this date, yes, you aren't mistaken. However, later in the novel, some significant things happen on Valentine's Day (i.e. February 14th), which is supposed to take place a couple weeks after this internal meeting. Hence, for continuity reasons, when the author revised her online edition, this date was changed to February 1st. So, though I am following the first edition in this translation, I still revised the date.

# Chapter 7: Sauteed Black Pepper “Little” Ribs (2)

Gu Sheng shut off her computer and threw herself onto her bed. Hugging her blankets, she started rolling around, back and forth. It was like her blood vessels had all completely burst. Her mind was filled with nothing but this amazing cast of people. It was practically the most desired line-up that she had been hoping for her entire life, k?

She was so thrilled she did not even hear her mobile phone until it had rung countless times.

When she picked up, it turned out to be the person she had just said goodbye to in the YY room: Geng Xiaoxing.

“Congratulations, Friend Gu Sheng.”

She laughed and asked what was going on and why was she calling so late.

“Actually... uh... I wanted to have a heart-to-heart chat with you.”

“Heart-to-heart chat?” Gu Sheng was puzzled. “We saw each other everyday – eating, sleeping, going to class together – and you never wanted any heart-to-heart chats. How come now we’re on holidays, just past Lunar New Year, and you start to have matters on your heart?”

On the other end of the phone, the other party started to hem and haw.

Her intuition told her this was an issue revolving around love. An issue regarding love? Then there was a high chance it had to do with that Wanmei Group Leader DaRen.

Sure enough, Geng Xiaoxing would start to say something, then stop, and finally, after several times of this, she confessed that she had just had her first-ever-in-history WeChat[1] session with Jue Mei Sha Yi. It was a purely personal, purely for friendship session. All he had done was merely tell her a ghost story, and she had fallen into bliss and was now unable to sleep.

Gu Sheng was about to die laughing as she listened to this. Jue Mei most definitely did not tell her just an ordinary ghost story. It was obviously one from Strange Tales of Liao-zhai about the ghost with the painted skin who would steal a person's soul[2].

"Friend Geng Xiaoxing," Gu Sheng said in a low tone so that her mom, who was watching television in the living room, would not be able to hear her. "Have you turned completely into a voice lover?"

"Huh?" Geng Xiaoxing was quiet for two seconds, and then she, too, lowered her voice. "It seems, perhaps, maybe... yes."

"If a guy is ridiculously handsome but his voice sounds bad, would you like him?"

"I think, it seems... no."

"If a guy is sweet and considerate but his voice sounds bad, would you like him?"

"Probably... not."

"If a guy is filthy rich but his voice sounds bad, would you like him?"

"No... no, I wouldn't."

"Congratulations! You have made the complete transformation into a voice lover."

Gu Sheng breathed out a long sigh, and, in a somewhat mournful voice, she stated, "If a guy's voice sounds bad and his standardized Mandarin pronunciation is not correct, but he wants to spend an entire lifetime with you... Oh, how painful that would be."

Geng Xiaoxing had previously scoffed at her views on this, but now she was fully in agreement.

Not handsome? But as long as he was clean, that was good enough. Not sweet? Well, he could be taught. And nowadays, if you did not have money, you could still work hard and earn lots in your career.....

However, if his voice sounded bad...



Simply unimaginable!

As these two voice lovers came into agreement, they had completely forgotten why Geng Xiaoxing had made the phone call in the first place.

She never thought that Toupai was absolutely the high-efficiency type. After only a few days, the planner for the song was starting to arrange a time with Gu Sheng for the first rehearsal for “Sword Cry in the Land of the Rivers and Lakes.”

Gu Sheng’s reply, of course, was that any time was fine with her.

Those people all had eminent statuses, and she would definitely conform to their needs, wholly and completely.

As a treat to Wanmei’s fans, this rehearsal was completely open to the public. Each of these people had plenty of his or her own fans. While Gu Sheng logged in and waited for the start time of the rehearsal, she watched as the audience numbers jumped from being in the thousands to ten thousands. She was becoming less and less calm. The screen below was continuously scrolling down like flowing water, so quickly that the comments were unreadable.

As she hung out there, waiting, she saw a sentence pop up in her private chat. It was Toupai

Qiang Qing Ci: Did you practice ahead of time?

Gu Sheng: Mm-hmm. Dada, don’t worry. I practiced for a long time.

Worried that she would embarrass Toupai or something along those lines, she had dared not go without practicing.

Even though she only had a few lines, the others with her were all golden voices... Pressure was intense, k?

Qiang Qing Ci did not reply again.

Following closely behind were private messages from Feng Ya Song, Jue Mei Sha Yi, and even Dou Dou Dou Bing telling her not to be nervous. Dou Dou Dou Bing also very considerately told her: Even if you sing better than all of us, you’ll still be criticized. You’re a new person... You’ll have

to withstand some pressure, eh. Add oil!

Gu Sheng immediately expressed her resolve: Don't worry. My heart is extremely healthy and strong!

After another ten minutes or so, they began chatting.

Listening to them, they all sounded like old friends, joking and bantering with each other. As usual, Qiang Qing Ci maintained his cool, withdrawn demeanor and did not come on his microphone... Gu Sheng, on the other hand, was too much of an unknown and really did not have much to say to these respected elders, so she also kept her microphone off and merely listened.

More than ten thousand people. It was almost equivalent to an outdoor concert.

But these hardcore fans were also happily listening to all these DaRen, many of whom had practically gone into hiding, chat away casually. Couldn't ask for more, k?!

Although this was called a rehearsal, because of the vocal delay problem that occurred in YY, it was not possible for them to actually sing a song together live. As a result, the format merely was, whoever amongst them wished to sing would then sing a couple lines. In reality, they were simply calling this a rehearsal in order to provide a pre-event warm-up for Wanmei's anniversary.

Sure enough, after the others had sung and it was Gu Sheng's turn, the fans below were not very enthusiastic.

The incessant love declarations to one's own Dada continued as before, completely treating her as if she was thin air.

Her singing was in superb form, and after completing her part, she discovered that, besides a few comments that had said her breath control was unsteady and she did not seem to have enough breath control, there really was not much criticism. She honestly felt good and at ease. Thankfully, she had not embarrassed Toupai.

"Our talented and refined Toupai DaRen?" Dou Dou Dou Bing very

wisely turned the cannons toward the biggest heavyweight of the night, Toupai. “Toupai? Toupai? Where are you? Come and receive your suitors[3]~”

Dou Dou Dou Bing was his old friend, so naturally she spoke more freely.

The channel went quiet for a few seconds.

“Mm. I’m here.” Qiang Qing Ci answered her, completely

A voice that hit the mark the instant it was heard. It was a male voice that was like an instant kill on all girls...

“Need me to speak some lines?” He followed up in an unhurried voice with a question.

“Speaking lines will be fine... not speaking them is fine, too. Just say something. Or give us a little special program or something.” Dou Dou Dou Bing exhaled a long breath. “It’s fortunate that you and I have known each other for several years now, so I’m immune. Qiang Qing Ci Dada, could you, just slightly, even a little bit, tone down your doting voice?”

Qiang Qing Ci could not help letting out a chuckle.

Gu Sheng could feel her heart give a thump. She was utterly intoxicated. Just one laugh and she was already truly intoxicated.

She had listened to him for two or three years now, too, k? How come she wasn’t the least bit immune? Oh heaven...

That absolutely natural, absolutely charming laughter – she had to secretly record it one day and use it as her ringtone or something.

He contemplated for a moment. “What sort of special program would be good?”

The comment box was scrolling by with remarks coming in like the tides.

“Qiang Qing Ci Dada, I love you! For all my life, ah!!!” “Dada, I’m your diehard fan, ah! Even when you cough, it sounds nice. So sexy don’t you

think don't you think don't you think, ah?!!!!" "DaRen, recite a full line of something, please. I'll record it to be a ringtone!" "Please, DaRen, say, 'You seductive little vixen, you.' Begging on my knees!" "I only want one sentence. 'I love you.' I'm going to record it and repeat it 100 times as my ringtone, yeah.".....

The fans were many tonight. The fans were crazy tonight. But the fans of the other artistes could not equal even one-tenth of the fervor of Toupai's fans

In the end, even the special guests could not help bursting out in laughter.

Fei Shao very subtly voiced his "envy." "Ai! Tonight, I'm completely beneath Toupai..."

He was being deliberately ambiguous. Dou Dou Dou Bing could not help shooting back at him, "Qiang Qing Ci never hits on girls and absolutely does not hit on guys. That's the custom here. Don't use our Toupai to play up a bromance[4]."

Fei Shao laughed, "Play up? Do I need to play one up? Haven't I reached the status of 'saint of bromance' already?"

He was a singer, so naturally, his speaking voice was not as rich and clearly articulated as Qiang Qing Ci's.

Gu Sheng thought to herself, any voice compared with Toupai's would instantly seem to grow dull...

"I..." Toupai stretched out the word, as if he was deliberating. The tone of the tail end of that word was truly spellbinding. "... will sing. Is that alright?"

Sing...

Sing?!

Sing??!!

Gu Sheng was shocked. The fans were shocked. The special guests and the people from Wanmei Group who were present were all shocked.

Who had ever heard Qiang Qing Ci sing? Absolutely no one, k?!

Back in the days when Qiang Qing Ci was very popular – crazily popular – on the internet, regardless of how the fans begged him, regardless of how important the event and host were, there was absolutely no way of making him open his mouth to sing... And so, everyone thought that Toupai was definitely a prime example of being tone deaf.

But now, tonight, Dada was going to sing?

Gu Sheng immediately pressed the record button. She could swear that everyone else in the room was doing that exact same thing she was doing: recording it...

Fei Shao choked on this a bit. Somewhat unbelievably, he said, “Qiang Qing Ci, are you trying to carve out a share of our singing world, too?”

Dou Dou Dou Bing also complained indignantly, “Hey, the way CVs and singers project their voices is different. Do you really think that if you use your fully CV voice to sing, you won’t go off-key?”

In contrast, Jue Mei Sha Yi, who had been watching from the sidelines the whole time, now very, very, very excitedly jumped in and interrupted, “You guys are finished. Your fans are going to completely defect now... The reason he didn’t sing is because his singing is too good, you know?”

Jue Mei Sha Yi let out a couple of loud chortles. He was totally looking forward to this.

Gu Sheng’s heart was thumping wildly, still not daring to believe this was real.

Until... until everyone had finished with their ranting and jeering and Qiang Qing Ci very calmly requested, “Sheng Sheng, could I trouble you to help me put up the lyrics?”

“Huh?” she blurted. The next second, she cleared her throat and replied in surrender, “Qiang Qing Ci Dada, my hands are handicapped. I’m absolutely incapable of handling lyrics and stuff like that...”

To follow along with each line he sang and put up the lyrics?

She reckoned that by the time he sang ten lines, she would still be only putting up the fourth line...

“It’s not a big deal,” Qiang Qing Ci told her with a hint of laughter in his voice, completely ignoring the countless number of lyrics experts who were volunteering themselves up for service. “However will be fine.”

However will be fine...

This could be done “however?” Could it be really be done just “however”?

This was Toupai’s first time singing, and she, the awful lyrics scroller, was definitely going to be beat to death.

Gu Sheng had no way out of this; she could not reject him there on the spot. She did not speak for three seconds but then steeled herself resolutely. “Dada, what song would you like to sing?”

He pondered briefly, then calmly stated a name: “Zui Meng Xian Lin.”  
[Drunken Dream in Divine Rain]

The moment that name was uttered, the microphones went totally silent.

A song for a female voice. And one that was absolutely sung in the high register.

Tonight, Toupai’s “beauty” was indeed going to quell the “beauty” of all the others here[5].

\*

[1] Orig. 微信 ‘Weixin.’ Literally meaning ‘micro-message.’ A text and voice messaging app. Besides text messaging, there is hold-to-talk voice messaging, social networking, group broadcast messaging, etc. This app is hugely popular in China but also has a following outside of the country. Its English name is WeChat. [www.wechat.com](http://www.wechat.com). Interesting side note: For those not familiar with the app, if you watched Boss and Me, the text messaging between Feng Teng and Shan Shan was not SMS. The

interface where they were typing was actually the WeChat interface. (I love this app!)

[2] 聊斋 “Liaozhai.” Liaozhai Zhiyi or Strange Tales of Liaozhai is a collection of hundreds of supernatural-themed stories. Amongst the more well known ones is the story, “Painted Skin” in which a gentleman takes in a beautiful young girl into his home. The girl actually turns out to be an evil, ugly ghost who had painted on a skin with the appearance of a beautiful maiden to fool the gentleman. Gu Sheng is secretly laughing that Geng Xiaoxing is acting like her soul’s been stolen, like she’s fallen under Jue Mei’s spell.

[3] 接客 “jie ke.” This term is actually used to refer to prostitutes coming to receive their patrons. In this context, Dou Bing is merely teasing, of course.

[4] 卖腐 “mai fu.” Literally, this means “to sell oneself as being ‘rotten,’” and is referring to someone who is associating himself with a boy-love rumour. In China, things associated with the 耽美 “danmei” or boy-love (BL) culture are often referred to as being 腐 “rotten.” This is not meant to be insulting. In fact, it is used by those who associate with this culture as a form of self-mockery in acknowledgement that they are aware that outsiders may criticize their preferences.

[5] 艳压群芳 “yan ya qun fang.” In a multitude of splendid and beautiful flowers, a single one stands out and surpasses all the others. In this context, Toupai’s talent was going to surpass all the other talented CVs and singers present.

\*

Additional comments:

剑啸江湖 “Sword Cry in the Land of the Rivers and Lakes” does not actually make an official singing appearance in the story. This scene is as close as it gets. I won’t translate the lyrics since they never appear in the story. (There are many more songs coming up in the story, and I promise I will be doing full translations on some of them. In fact, there’s one next chapter.) In summary, the lyrics are introducing the characters in the

game, with one singer for each character. We can have fun speculating which character and lyrics Sheng Sheng would be singing.

[[[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p\\_8\\_5OeyDW4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_8_5OeyDW4)]]

A little aside, does anyone else count seven individual singers that would be needed for this song, not six like what was written in the novel? A minor glitch that will likely be edited out when the novel goes to the printing press?

By the way, I made up the term “lyrics scroller.” ;) I couldn’t think of any way to describe it. From what I understand, nowadays in YY, there are programs you can use to do the lyrics while you sing, but I think you need to do some prep work to time it along with the music. From what my quick digging found out, Tto manually put up lyrics is basically a cut and paste job in time with the music, but to do this, line-by-line, actually takes some skill so that you don’t lag behind the singer.



# Chapter 8: Sauteed Black Pepper “Little” Ribs (3)

With all her might, Gu Sheng forced herself to remain calm. Calm like she was a professional lyrics scroller.

However, when the musical introduction came through in her headphones, she thoroughly lost her cool, to the extent that, with her hands on the keyboard, she was ridiculously flustered. What would Toupai’s voice sound like when singing? What would it sound like? ...

She was too anxious, so much so that when he sang the first word, she thought she was hallucinating.

[[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdJMgaCnXsc>]]

“Wearing a bamboo hat in the misty rain, quietly waiting for the light to break through from behind the clouds

Listening to the teachings of the Three [Taoist] Pure Ones and reciting ‘so I have heard Buddha’s words’[1]

One turn of the hand overturns fortune maps[2], another turn alters Heaven and Earth...”

Such a deep, low, authoritative voice, k?! It sounds just too good, k?!!!!

If the female version of this song could be described as ethereal, then Qiang Qing Ci’s version gave the feeling of someone standing with arms crossed as an onlooker over the world.

Misty-eyed.

Such amazing resonance in his chest voice!

Such amazing control when changing registers!

The chorus came to an abrupt halt. In her headphones, the singing suddenly became speaking. Qiang Qing Ci was speaking the lyrics using his ancient-style voice:

“The path to divinity appears close, but actually walking it out, [realize

that] it is far

Continuous rain, unending snow

Lonely, but may as well face people with a smile...”

A slight reverb had been added to his audio, making that dotting tone heard at the end of his phrases all but vanish. Now, it was truly a voice that conjured up the image of a man of graceful bearing and a scene of boundless serene beauty...

If she had not been putting up lyrics, she would definitely have been covering her chest with her hand. DaRen, can you not have such an amazing ability to convey emotion?

He truly did! Too much so, in fact!

A CV who could sing was an enemy to all singers. Every art had people who specialized in it. Those who specialized in speech were weak in singing; those who sang well were utterly unprofessional in delivering lines. But... this type of general knowledge was totally invalid when used on Toupai.

It was not only Gu Sheng...

The excitement level of every person in that room was rocketing off the meter.

This was something that could only be happened upon and not asked for. Only happened upon and not asked for, ah.

All that the fans could do, besides making love declarations, making love declarations, and making more love declarations, was just make love declarations. Aside from love declarations, there was nothing that could express the exhilaration they were feeling. Gu Sheng wanted to look at the screen that was being flooded with comments, listen to the singing, and, at the same time, also do a good job of putting up the lyrics. Totally mentally and physically draining. She felt that because she had not been able to lie quietly on her bed and listen carefully to Toupai's song, she honestly was never going to be able to find the feeling of love again.

Finally, even the administrators, Dou Dou Dou Bing and Feng Ya Song joined in with the army that was spamming the screen with comments, complaining with all their might about how Qiang Qing Ci really knew how to hide his talents deep away.

Dou Dou Dou Bing: Qiang Qing Ci, you should just change your name to ‘Qing Guo Qing Cheng[3]’ [Unrivalled Allure]. I’ll be your diehard fan forever!

Feng Ya Song: Wanmei’s temple is too small...Simply too small. In the end, it can’t contain the great beauty that you are...

Fei Shao: D\*mn! I’m going to wash my hands in the golden basin[4]! No way I can make a living now...

.....

Just when everyone was listening to the point they felt they were going to burst a blood vessel, the background music abruptly stopped.

“Let’s leave it at that.” He cleared his throat and stated lightly, “That’s about it.”

.....

.....

.....

.....

Gu Sheng had an urge to start crying.

Dou Dou Dou Bing had already jumped in and was the first to turn on her microphone: “That’s too cruel! Who only sings half a song??!! Toupai, that’s too unprofessional of you! So infuriating!

“I’m not a cover singer. I don’t need to have professional ethics when it comes to this,” he chuckled. “It’s good now. It’s enough.”

Good? Enough?

That’s something you should ask your audience, k, Toupai DaRen?.....

“Alright, alright. It’s not as if you guys don’t know Qiang Qing Ci’s

temperament.” Jue Mei Sha Yi’s very timely voice came onto his microphone, trying to pacify the crowd... “How about I sing a little passage for all of you?...”

“You get lost.” Dou Dou Dou Bing did not bother giving their group leader any face at all. “There are so many golden voices here tonight. You take your leave now!”

“Fine... I’ll shut off my mike.” Jue Mei Sha Yi was known for his easygoing nature; otherwise, when faced with this nasty bunch[5], there was no way he could be the “purple horse[6].”

“Well... now.” Dou Dou Dou Bing immediately turned the topic back around. “Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen, I’m now, ahem ahem, now seriously starting to get nervous when I talk to you. Gosh, you know me; I love men who can sing.”

“Can you possibly suck up even more? ...” Feng Ya Song burst out laughing. “... O our great assistant group leader.”

“You go take your leave from your highness’s presence now.” Dou Dou Dou Bing gave a hmph. “Those who are tone deaf are not allowed to speak tonight.”

With tail between his legs, Feng Ya Song also turned off his microphone.

“Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen?” Dou Dou Dou Bing continued to wag her tail.

“Hmm?”

“What... are you doing?”

Qiang Qing Ci thought over his answer briefly. “Listening to you guys talk.”

“DaRen, do you have any other special program, or do you have anything you want to say to the fans?”

He seemed as if he wanted to leave, and from the sounds of it, it really did appear as if he was winding things down. “Let me think.”

A hush settled momentarily over the channel.

Considering that tonight, Unrivalled Allure Toupai Daren's performance had sent everyone's blood surging much too fast, they were all extremely looking forward to how he was going to conclude.

"What I want to say is..." He seemed to be eating something along the lines of a throat lozenge, and his enunciation was not very clear. In a muffled, gentle, doting tone, he gave a low laugh and said, "Don't invest yourself too much into liking someone simply because you are infatuated with a voice. You never know, on the other side of the Internet, what type of person the owner of the voice is, right?"

Right?

Right...

No! Not right, k?!

If someone else had said that, it might have been more convincing.

But Toupai DaRen, tonight, you first used your voice to seduce everyone and then warned everyone not to be too infatuated with a voice ... Did you do that on purpose? You must have did that purpose. Absolutely, it was on purpose!

Sure enough, the fans very fittingly started spamming the screen, all of them crying, Daren, I love you. Forever behind you!

Jue Mei Sha Yi was giddy with glee. Clearing his throat, he used his domineering, manly voice to override the fans' enthusiasm. "Qiang Qing Ci Dada meant, liking the voice is good enough. Don't let the voice deceive your feelings. Oh, you know, a rational type of liking. Uh, yeah, a rational type of liking."

.....

.....

Fine, he knew that he was making up bullsh\*\*.

Gu Sheng, the little lyrics scroller, had apparently been forgotten and engulfed into the crowd as she listened to their bantering and mocking.

So amusing. It was because they were all speaking through the Internet that everyone was so amusing. This was what was meant by birds of a feather flock together...

She felt Qiang Qing Ci must have left already. Turning off the sound recording function, she started to search for her software, with the intention of clipping out Toupai DaRen's half a song that he had sung. She had just opened up the software when Qiang Qing Ci unexpectedly sent over a private chat.

Qiang Qing Ci: Have something urgent to do. I need to go.

Gu Sheng hastily typed off on her keyboard: DaRen, hurry and go then ^^

As for why DaRen would suddenly say goodbye to her, uh, she guessed it was probably to be polite or something...

A polite goodbye to the little lyrics scroller whom he had just collaborated with for the first time. Uh huh.

Qiang Qing Ci: Do you have WeChat?

Gu Sheng: Yup, Dada.

Qiang Qing Ci: Is it okay to add each other in WeChat?

.....

Gu Sheng stared at the screen dazedly..... DaRen he...wants...wants...wants... wants to add me as a friend in WeChat?

Qiang Qing Ci: Moqingcheng. That's me. Sorry. Need to go now.

Gu Sheng continued to gaze blankly at the screen..... This is DaRen's... his... his... his... his WeChat ID?

\*

[1] The Three Pure Ones, 三清 are the three highest gods in Taoism. "So I have heard Buddha's words" 如是我闻 is a phrase frequently seen in Buddhist scripture. This line is saying the person knows both Taoism and Buddhism but does not belong to either.

[2] 命格 ‘ming ge.’ Also known as one’s “birth chart” or “natal horoscope.” In Chinese fortune-telling, one’s fortune, encounters, love, etc. are laid out already at birth and are written into one’s “ming ge.’

[3] 倾国倾城. Literally ‘downfall of a country and city.’ This idiom describes beauty that can cause the ruin of a country or a city and is usually used to describe a woman. In this context, it is a teasing tone but it is meant to say that Toupai’s talents and allure are unrivalled. This nickname for Toupai will come up many more times. For readability, I may simplify this as “Unrivalled Allure.”

[4] In wuxia stories, a pugilist would wash his hands in a golden basin to signify his retirement from the pugilistic world.

[5] 牛鬼蛇神 “niu gui she shen.” Literally, “ghosts with heads like an ox, gods with bodies like serpents.” Originally used to describe things of fantasy or grotesque things but evolved to become a metaphor describing all sorts of ugly things or bad people.

[6] YY horse levels, described in chapter 6 footnotes. The purple horse is the channel founder and owner. In a more casual sense, the “purple horse” of a group is the leader.

\*

### Additional Comments:

I tried very hard to find a good male cover of the song Toupai sings but to no avail. (Of course, my silly Mac couldn’t play many of the covers I found, so there may still be some out there.) The Youtube video is the original version of the song. If you really need a male singer, here is one by Qi Ran, an online cover singer, although I find it just so-so.

As promised, below is the full translation of 醉梦仙霖 “Drunken Dream in Divine Rain.” I tried to find an MV with eye candy, but all the fan-made MVs seemed to focus on a romantic love theme. The lyrics, I believe, aren’t really about romantic love at all, so I decided to let your imaginations fill in the video portion. If you need your eye candy, search for the Chinese name in Youtube.

I've spent the last several nights translating ancient style songs from the novel and have come to the conclusion that, besides poems in classical Chinese, these will be the bane of my translation existence. Forgive the song translation for not sounding very poetic. First, here's my summary and interpretation of the song followed by the actual lyrics:

A lonely silhouette wearing a bamboo hat stands patiently in the drizzling rain, waiting for the light to break through the clouds. He knows both the Taoist and Buddhist teachings, although he does not belong to either. He is a person of great ability, seemingly able to overturn the heavens and fate with just a flick of his hand. He recalls his days of youth, when he walked alone, sword in hand, travelling all over and purging the world of evil. In those days, he still had the rough edges of arrogance that had not been sanded down by time, and he dared rebuke even Heaven and Earth for seeming to turn a blind eye. But in the end, he learned that, did it really matter whether things were a result of good or bad fortune? Letting himself loose just one time, he allows himself to become drunk, not caring about anything. He does not want to separate reality from dream right now, whether what he is doing really is just a dream. He cannot forget his feelings – love, friendship, family – so he feels trapped. And so, he stands, a lonely silhouette with his bamboo hat, waiting for the unending rain, the constant snow to stop, and for the light to break through the clouds, bringing hope and enlightenment. For the path to divinity may not seem too difficult, but only when you have walked it out yourself do you realize that it is a hard and lonely journey. But, he chooses to walk it with a smile.

[0:27] [2:26] 着一笠烟雨静候天光破云

Wearing a bamboo hat in the misty rain, quietly waiting for the light to break through from behind the clouds

[0:33] [2:33] 聆三清妙音也号如是我闻

Listening to the teachings of the Three [Taoist] Pure Ones and reciting 'so I have heard Buddha's words'

[0:40] [2:40] 翻手反排命格 覆手复立乾坤



One turn of the hand overturns fortune maps, another turn alters  
Heaven and Earth

[0:48] [2:48] 为道为僧 又何必区分

Whether for Taoism or for Buddhism, why is there a need to make the  
distinction?

[0:56] [2:56] 霜花剑上雕镂一缕孤韧

Engraved into the sword is a forlorn tenacity

[1:04] [3:04] 踏遍千山涤荡妖魁魔魂

Traversing thousands of mountains, purging demon chiefs and devil  
spirits

[1:11] [3:11] 少年一事能狂 敢骂天地不仁

For a moment in those youthful years, daring to rebuke Heaven and  
Earth for being heartless

[1:18] [3:18] 才不管机缘还是祸根

Not caring whether things are by luck or by bane

[1:25] [3:25] [3:55] 醉极弹歌一场

In my intoxication, let me play a song

[1:29] [3:29] [3:59] 梦与我孰为真

My dreams or myself here, which is the one that is real?

[1:33] [3:33] [4:03] 不能忘情徒惹得心困

Unable to be devoid of feelings, the heart feels imprisoned

[1:41] [3:41] [4:11] 仙路看近行远

The path to divinity appears close, but actually walking it out, [realize  
that] it is far

[1:44] [3:44] [4:14] 霖林雨雪纷纷

Continuous rain, unending snow

[1:48] [3:48] [4:18] 寂寥也不妨笑面对人

Lonely, but may as well face people with a smile

# Chapter 9: Sauteed Black Pepper “Little” Ribs (4)

She was feeling like she had been tossed into the clouds and was unable to climb out.

Moqingcheng?

DaRen’s name was Moqingcheng?

Mo Qingcheng [莫倾城[1]]? So.... not an unassuming name? Gu Sheng opened up her WeChat, searched for this ID, and successfully added it. And then... the other end was very quiet and did not send over any messages. For a moment, she even wondered whether she had added the wrong person. In the end, she very sincerely input a message: Qiang Qing Ci Dada, this is Sheng Sheng Man.

Conversing at such a close “distance” with Qiang Qing Ci was totally different from the atmosphere in YY.

This one-on-one conversation window, along with her bunny profile picture, was making her feel that things were just too close.

My gawd, my gawd. So close that she was feeling a little too nervous.

She held her phone, waiting, and then, when she saw the status change to “other party is inputting,” her eyes immediately widened. Soon, inside her WeChat app, Qiang Qing Ci had sent over a voice message.

Voice message...

DaRen ... Can you not... take this one step at a time and start with just text?

She stared wordlessly for a while at that unlistened to voice message.

All of a sudden, she set down her mobile phone, slipped quietly to her door, and locked it. Through the door, she listened to the sounds in the living room. Dad and Mom were watching a Spring Festival program, and things were very lively at the moment. They would not be paying any attention to her for the next little while.

Confirming that there would be no immediate risk, she hopped back onto her bed.

She picked up her phone once again, switched the sound over to headset mode, and listened to the message he had sent.

That voice that had been in a countless number of period dramas and commercials was now answering her casually, “I knew it was you.”

.....

So... should I be using text or voice messages?...

Since DaRen had used a voice message, it wouldn't be very good if I continued to be all high and mighty and aloof and use serious, reserved text, right? ...

Gu Sheng lightly cleared her throat and softly practiced a few sentences to make sure she was in relatively good form.

Then, she held down the “hold to talk” button.

And then..... she did not know what to say. Anxious, she accidentally released the button, and the message was sent off. T T

A blank message of white noise had been sent off.

Oh crud...

Stupid WeChat! There was no way to cancel sent voice messages...  
aaah!

Qiang Qing Ci speedily sent back a reply: “What's that?”

Gu Sheng was about to burst into tears, feeling that her image in Toupai's eyes had definitely taken a hit. Painfully, she buried her face in her arm and silently scoffed at herself. “Gu Sheng, just go die ... You can choose whatever method you want...” Do you think Toupai Daren has a lot of time on his hands? Everyday, he has tens of thousands of @, tens of thousands of comments that he doesn't have time to read, you know? He may have ten inboxes that have exploded because they were so full, you know? ...

After cursing herself as speedily as she possibly could, she hastily coughed a couple of times, and then this time, she very prudently thought about what she would say before pressing the “hold to talk” button. “Um ... May I ask why Daren is contacting me?”

It seemed... a little too formal, didn't it?

She fidgeted a little nervously.

“No real reason. I remember you owe me a song.” His voice was leisurely, and he seemed to be outdoors. The sound of road traffic could be heard in the background.

“Uh... DaRen, you... want to listen to one now?”

Gu Sheng almost felt tears springing up in her eyes. She glanced at the time on her mobile phone: 11:30 p.m. already.

“Now?” Qiang Qing Ci's voice sounded a bit surprised and also contained a hint of a doting chuckle...

How did it turn into her volunteering herself up again? Gu Sheng continued feeling as if she was going to cry.

She was already reaching for her throat lozenges, having decided that no matter what, she would go all out and sing for Toupai.

Qiang Qing Ci suddenly sent over another voice message: “It's too late now. Tomorrow.”

Such a considerate DaRen...

Gu Sheng exhaled lightly in relief. “Thank you, DaRen. I will definitely get ready to sing for you tomorrow. Mm-hmm.”

“Okay.”

And so... they were done?

Gu Sheng looked at the chat history in WeChat, wondering how she could somehow save the messages, download them to her computer, and edit them so she could hoard them in her private collection. In the future, if there was anything on television with Toupai doing the dubbing, she

could take these out and show them to Mom and Dad ... Well, maybe she'd just forget about that idea. She would show them to... Ugh, she suspected no matter whom she showed them to, she'd still be chased down and killed...

Better just to keep them in her private collection...

While she was still planning out what she was going to do, another alert all of a sudden sounded from her phone. Qiang Qing Ci had sent over two messages back to back. The first one was 60 seconds long, the second one was 20 seconds.

Two minutes ago? Really just two minutes ago?

She checked the message-received time three times. There really was only two minutes ago...

Hurriedly, she stuffed the earbud back into her ear and laid down on her bed to listen to the first message.

Qiang Qing Ci's voice was heard again. It sounded so nice... it made her want to cry. "I suddenly remembered, I haven't given you any recipes in a long time now.

"Sauteed black pepper little ribs. Mm ... Really quite tasty.

"The 'little ribs' in this case are beef short ribs. Debone the short ribs. Pour over them rice wine, oyster sauce, soy sauce, and black pepper sauce. Then, add cracked black pepper, chicken bouillon, and cornstarch. Mix it all well. Finally, you add water and use your hands to bring the ingredients together.

"Leave it for... about fifteen minutes or so before heating up oil in a pan and sautéing briefly over high heat, just until the meat changes color. Now, add green onion, winter bamboo shoots, and bell pepper slices. Sauté it all again until the meat is cooked through, and then it can be removed from the pan."

In the background of his voice message, the sound of a taxicab's radio could be heard.

However, Qiang Qing Ci's voice was even more entrancing than the DJ's on that midnight radio show. It was an unpretentious type of allure...

Gu Sheng did not know whether she was overcome by hunger or just mesmerized, for even her breathing had slowed.

It was as if she was afraid to disturb what he was saying, having completely forgotten that this was merely a voice recording.

The app automatically jumped to the next message. "Black pepper is something that is very flavorful when it's put on the grill. It's really quite nice. If you don't want to make short ribs, you could also try beef sirloin. But... really, the meat of short ribs is the most suitable.

"Alright, it's really late. Go get some rest.

"Good night."

Light and gentle, like a whispered good night next to her ear.

Gu Sheng was in somewhat of a daze as she listened. Although, early in his career, Qiang Qing Ci had recorded many clips for his fans, including all sorts of bedtime stories or morning wake-up alarms, none of them could compare to this live version in their ability to cause her heart to skip a beat.

Heart flutters.

That was what she had felt the very first time she heard his voice.

Absolutely no exaggeration.

She remembered, that first time, when she had been half-forced by someone to listen to his voice, after the first few words, she had clearly heard the sound of her own furious heartbeat. And then, she was completely converted into a voice lover, with no chance of turning back.

She hurriedly sent back one sentence: "Good night, DaRen."

Gu Sheng re-listened to the messages several more times. All of a sudden, she felt like she needed to eat something... Opening her door, she shuffled across the room in front of her dad and mom, then shuffled back again, all the while thinking, compared to black pepper beef short ribs,

the food in her home was pathetic ... Pathetic ... In the end, she grabbed a package of instant oatmeal to make with some hot milk.

Even while heating up the milk in the microwave, she was still holding onto her mobile phone.

She recalled the conversation not long ago. So remarkable.

She could not help opening up her Weibo. Very, very happily, she tweeted: So happy! What should I do? Gosh, what should I do? .....

Very soon, the microwave stopped. Setting her mobile phone down off to the side, she started making her oatmeal. When it was thoroughly stirred, she picked up her phone again. Less than two minutes had elapsed... and there were... there were... more than 200 replies...

Since she had first registered her Weibo account, she had never had more than an average of ten replies to anything, you know? ...

She clicked on the post, flipping through the pages to read through the comments.

She did not know any of these people who had replied.

The number of replies was still rapidly increasing. Besides expressing all forms of jealousy, envy, and rage that left her feeling baffled, the most common reply was, "..... I didn't see anything."

Gu Sheng was bewildered.

All she could do was continue to flip back and keep reading to see what had happened...

She reached the earliest few replies... and finally saw the origin of the story.

Qiang Qing Ci: smile It's good that you're happy.

Dou Dou Dou Bing: ..... I didn't see anything.

Jue Mei Sha Yi: ..... I didn't see anything.

Feng Ya Song: ..... I didn't see anything.

Fei Shao: ..... Holy cr\*p. I didn't see anything.



Person A: ..... I didn't see anything.

Person B: I hate you Sheng Sheng Man! Biting my hankie furiously!

Person C: ..... I ... didn't see anything.

.....

\*

[1]莫倾城。Gu Sheng is speculating that this is Toupai's name. 倾城 means “downfall of a city,” and in short, means beauty that causes the ruin of a city. These are the last two character in the nickname that Dou Dou Bing gave him in the previous chapter and that I simplified as Unrivalled Allure. (Refer to footnote [3] in chapter 8.)

# Chapter 10: Poached “Pearls” with Conch

## (1)

Gu Sheng kept her agreed meeting with Qiang Qing Ci at the forefront of her mind.

The next day, she purposely pretended to be ill so she did not have to accompany her parents to visit relatives ... However, her mobile phone and Weibo were extremely quiet the entire day. She pondered, what calendar did the “tomorrow” that Toupai was talking about follow? She was somewhat unable to focus. By the third day, she inconspicuously opened up her alternate YY ID and, as if under a spell, took a stroll through Toupai’s chat room.

Thousands of usernames were staying online in that room, and several hundred of them were actually active and entertaining themselves inside.

Toupai’s fan base was enormous, so even though it was not the weekend, there were still scheduled events. To keep up the popularity of the channel, currently popular CVs or online singers would be invited by moderators of the YY channel to be special guests. But, to be honest, Qiang Qing Ci’s channel did not need any help maintaining its popularity...

The artistes who were invited would instantly gain several hundred new fans. They were obviously the ones who were on the benefitting end, k?

In her headset, she heard a familiar-sounding voice. Gu Sheng glanced at the user handle: Zou Diao’er [Off-Key].

Gu Sheng knew this boy. That delicate, girly voice, didn’t it belong to her own music association?

When the boy discovered that she was online in YY and was in Toupai’s channel, he immediately sent her a YY private message: Sheng Sheng Man, I want to hug a thigh ..... Hurry. Stick your thigh over here ...

Gu Sheng: →\_→

Zou Diao'er: →\_→ while you're still not Toupai's official golden master[1], I'm gonna hurry and hug it tight.

Gu Sheng: →\_→ ..... Purely a misunderstanding.

Zou Diao'er: →\_→ Usually, anyone in that romantically ambiguous phase always says it's just a misunderstanding.

Gu Sheng: .....

She was just about to leave the chat room when she heard the channel host suddenly address Zou Diao'er, who had just finished his performance and was about to smoothly turn off his microphone. "Zou Diao'er Dada, I seem to recall that Sheng Sheng Man is in the same music association as you."

Instantly, the screen was flooded with comments of "Sheng Sheng Man!!!!" Completely, ridiculously flooded.

Zou Diao'er gave an awkward laugh, coughed two times, and said "uh" a couple of times ...

Gu Sheng felt a chill travel down her back and hurriedly private messaged him: Don't you dare say anything about Toupai DaRen and me.

After sending the message, though, she felt she had done the wrong thing...

Why did it feel like she was conspicuously trying to declare, "Honest, there really isn't 300 taels of silver hidden here[2]"? Oh Lord, have pity and be her witness. She really did not have any silver hidden. Not even a measly coin ...

Gu Sheng was still struggling within herself when she heard the boy cough another couple of times. "Uh, she's one of the favourites in our association. She sings covers, arranges songs, does post-production, does artistic work ..."

In silence, Gu Sheng wearily shut her eyes.

Kid, your shameless over-exaggeration is going to get exposed soon ...

The host gave an "oh," but then added, "Dada, don't try to change the

subject. Tell us ... our Toupai and Sheng Sheng Man... Ahem, ahem... You know what I mean.” Zou Diao’er was quiet for two seconds.

Sheng Sheng Man immediately sent over another sentence to him: If you dare say a single word, I’ll hunt you down to the ends of the earth ...

“About that ...” Zou Diao’er’s voice had a hint of laughter in it. With another cough, he continued, “I can’t say anything. Sheng Sheng Man said I’m not allowed to say a single word regarding the two of them ...”

The host gave another knowing “oh.”

Below, the fans’ hearts were breaking, and they were starting to wail.

“I didn’t hear anything.....” “I didn’t hear anything.....” “Well, I personally think, our Toupai DaRen is nearly twenty-six years old. He should have a golden master..... biting my hankie I can hear the sound of my own heart shattering to pieces...” “I didn’t hear anything.....” “Toupai belongs to everyone! No one is allowed to take that beauty for herself! Over my dead body!” “Toupai DaRen’s name has been famous for more than ten years. So many beautiful, attractive golden masters have tried unsuccessfully to own him..... What makes that Sheng Sheng Man so special?..... Get lost! Go get lost! Not allowed!”

Gu Sheng thought.....

Alright... Her brain was incapable of thinking already.

Her dignity, reputation, and the opinions floating around about her had basically followed after Toupai DaRen and been destroyed on that blood vessel-bursting night... If her reputation was ripped to shreds, fine, but Toupai DaRen’s reputation was of utmost importance ...

She deliberated this and considered that, then deliberated this and considered that again.

Gu Sheng felt she should probably first report the situation to him herself.

She pulled out her mobile phone from underneath her pillow, opened up WeChat, and cleared her throat. “DaRen... I’d to talk to you about

something.”

The voice recording was sent off with a whoosh.

Gripping her phone, she quietly waited. But as she waited and waited, she started feeling unsettled, with all sorts of speculations over what Toupai’s reaction would be after he received the message.

What if DaRen didn’t like being disturbed?

What if DaRen had already deleted her in WeChat?

What if DaRen found her annoying?

What if DaRen...

Gu Sheng had always prided herself on not letting anything faze her, except when faced with her most beloved idol, she honestly could not stay calm and collected. After waiting for a while, she decided she could not just let herself keep staring at her phone. But when she put her phone on the table, she still could not help pricking up her ears to listen...

And then suddenly, a WeChat message came back.

Gu Sheng opened it up. It was Toupai, it was Toupai!..... Thank goodness, thank goodness.

Only one second long?

In one second, you can say, what? Three words? Two words?

Puzzled, she tapped the message to open it and placed the phone next to her ear. She heard Qiang Qing Ci’s voice very groggily give an “mm”... It was really just a single “mm” and that was it. Have you ever heard anyone send a voice message with just this one word? Can this word really be spoken so clearly and pleasantly, yet at the same time, have such a dazed feel in it that causes your heart to flood with tenderness?

Her mind was suddenly assaulted with an image: slightly hidden behind the curtains of a canopy, a charming young man, his clothes half undone, was lying on his side on a couch bed ...

Gu Sheng felt a little like she could not handle the thought anymore.

Affected by Toupai's message, even her voice was lowered when she spoke. "DaRen, you were sleeping just now?"

After a short while, Qiang Qing Ci sent another message. Still only one second.

What would he say this time? She had absolutely no idea.

She moved the phone to her ear and heard Qiang Qing Ci say ... another "mm." This time, Toupai DaRen seemed slightly more alert, and his voice was warm and gentle.

Listening to him, Gu Sheng's heart felt as if it was drifting.

As a true, experienced voice lover, she felt as if she was definitely, immediately ... not going to be able to take it anymore.

"Um... DaRen, you're awake now?"

"Mm."

Gu Sheng: "S, I ... can talk to you about the thing I wanted to discuss?"

"Mm." Qiang Qing Ci could not hold back a little chuckle.

.....

Four successive mm-s.

Together, they created a set of living portraits of "beauty."

The first was a young nobleman, not quite fully roused and still in a dreamlike state, his eyes glazed over and his voice husky.

The second was a young prince, his hand holding a broth to dispel the effects of alcohol, his eyes turned up in a slight smile, his voice warm and smooth.

The third, a striking general, his sleeves partially rolled back, his eyes alluring and sparkling, his voice doting.

The fourth was ... the most provocative. A handsome, young king awakened in his chambers, his arms lightly embracing a maiden, his voice sensual ...

.....

As her mind finished filling in the last of these details, her brain completely stopped working and all her blood seemed to rush upwards.

“Ah, um ... DaRen, I forgot what I wanted to say ... You go ahead and keep sleeping ...”

\*

[1] 金主 “jin zhu.” Literally means gold or golden master. (I’m choosing to use golden master purely because it sounds cuter.) This term most accurately is describing a financier, someone who has much money and can control money, but in slang, it is often referring to a “sugar daddy” or “sugar mama,” i.e. someone who has exclusive access to you. In this teasing context Zou Diao’er is calling Sheng Sheng the golden master of Toupai, saying she has exclusive access that no one else has to him, in other words, his girlfriend.

[2] 此地无银三百两 “ci di wu yin san bai liang.” Literally meaning, “this land does not have 300 taels [an archaic Chinese monetary unit] of silver.” An idiom describing a guilty person who is pretending to be innocent. As he tries to cover up his secret by declaring there is nothing, he slips and gives himself away.

\*

Additional Comments:

LOL. Sheng Sheng’s mind sure can fill in a lot of blanks from just hearing Toupai’s voice. Think the pic at the top is similar to one of the images she conjured up?

BTW, anyone notice Toupai’s age was mentioned? But it said earlier in the story that his age was a mystery. ;)

# Chapter 11: Poached “Pearls” with Conch

## (2)

Qiang Qing Ci did not seem to mind.

“It’s okay. Let’s just chat then.” He finally said a full sentence. There was still a sense in his voice, though, that he had just woken up, or in other words, his vocal chords still had not completely warmed up yet.

Such a fortunate thing. It made his voice seem a lot more real.

As a cover singer of ancient-style songs, she was completely powerless to resist voices spoken in ancient-style that were able to conjure up vivid images.

If her mind was brought back to modern times ... Uh, well, she could remain slightly more composed.

She sent back: “Sure, Dada.”

And then ... did not know what she should talk about.

Gu Sheng never mingled in the online entertainment circle. In the 2-D world, besides knowing the fellow members in her own music association, the only others she would associate with were the occasional person who asked her to sing songs composed by someone else. The reason why she had chosen to be an ancient-style cover singer and not be a CV in the first place was because she felt that singers did not need to socialize. She could teach herself the post-production work, and then she would still be able to have fun by herself. A CV, however, could not voice act a drama with just herself, right?

That was the reason why many CVs had their own public WeChat accounts and could handle the attention with ease.

Singers who were articulate were a rarity.

Gu Sheng leaned back into the couch and contemplated for a long while what conversation topic would be suitable to talk about with DaRen.

“DaRen, you’re not busy?”



“Mm. Resting right now.”

“Well, um ... DaRen, what do you usually do during your rest periods?”

“Sleep.” Qiang Qing Ci paused briefly, then added, “Or go to the recording studio.”

So ... the rumors were true that Toupai had a career that was very busy? Being a commercial voice artist was just a ... side job?

Gu Sheng's admiration for Toupai grew that much more.

“DaRen, will you be going to the recording studio today?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“Doing voice acting for a video game?”

Collaboration between video game producers and the various 2-D world entertainment circles was the most common type of partnership seen. This included working with writers and CVs, and even big name ancient-style singers were often invited to sing the theme songs for video games. She seemed to recall there was a recently released video game that had teamed up with three of the different circles: writers had provided background support while CVs and ancient-style singers had taken part in the promotional video.

“Mm-hmm.”

“Um... DaRen, it's been three years since you participated in Wanmei's anniversary celebration. How come you've decided to take part this year?”

“This year happens to be the tenth anniversary celebration.” Qiang Qing Ci was quiet for a moment. “It's not very likely I'd be able to get out of Wanmei's tenth anniversary event.”

No wonder this time around he was making an appearance. Tenth anniversary was a big event.

“That's true ... Um, then, DaRen, are you planning on coming back into the online entertainment circle?”

“No,” he answered simply. “After this tenth anniversary celebration, I'm

going to completely retire my mike in the online world.”

“..... That’s a shame.”

Several years ago, Qiang Qing Ci already had stopped accepting new projects, voicing dramas, and doing special performances for birthday celebrations. These last few years, all of his works had come out of a recording studio and were all commercial voice projects ... However, even when he was still doing online voice acting, he had not voiced very many dramas. All of his friends in the circle were veteran figures who had been around in the beginning when online voice acting had not yet become popular.

People who were not close to him were not familiar with him at all, and those who were close were all good friends...

Not the least bit of gossip about him was available.

Or rather, no one had information on him to gossip about.

The direct result of this was that Gu Sheng could not find a topic to carry out a conversation with him. She knew very much about Qiang Qing Ci, knew how many dramas he had voiced, to the point she could even recite every single classic line he had ever spoken. But ... she also did not know him. As a real person, which city he lived, what his occupation was, and even whether he was working or still studying were all things she knew absolutely nothing about.

She thought hard about what question she could ask next.

“Your chatting is more like an interview,” Qiang Qing Ci very gently corrected her.

(◕◕)... It did seem so.

Gu Sheng blew out a breath, then confessed, “I actually don’t know what DaRen likes to talk about...”

“I haven’t been in the 2-D world for a long time. Treat me like a 3-D world [real life] friend. Talk about anything.”

“Uh ... well... DaRen, have you eaten?”

Alright. 3-D world topics were even less exciting.

Who could tell her, how were two people, who had completely gotten to know each other only through online interactions, supposed to talk in a real life, 3-D world way?

She gradually started to recover her sense enough to recall her original intention for contacting Qiang Qing Ci. “Oh right, Daren, I remember the reason why I wanted to talk to you ...”

Mirth could be heard in Qiang Qing Ci’s voice. “That was not an easy thing for you... Go ahead.”

“It’s just that, I suspect, because DaRen you helped me get that opportunity to sing with all those Dadas, there might be some... not so good rumors circling on the Internet.” From the standpoint of one of Qiang Qing Ci’s supporters, Gu Sheng told him very seriously, “At the start, my thoughts on this were really very simple. The opportunity to work with all those Dadas ... is every little unknown singer’s dream. But now, I’m afraid ... I’ve brought some negative impact on DaRen, you.”

“Mm. Such as?”

“Such as... losing fans? Such as... gossip flying everywhere?”

“Mm.”

.....

Toupai seemed ... as if he did not really care?

After a little while, Qiang Qing Ci sent over a relatively longer voice message. “If what is being said on the Internet is making you unhappy, when you shut off your computer, it all becomes nothing. As a voice actor, the only thing that I should care about is my own works. Besides what is said about my works, anything said by other people has nothing to do with me.”

Now that he explained it this way ... Gu Sheng immediately felt as if she was behaving childishly by actually taking something on the Internet seriously. And she had even been worried that it would have a negative

effect on him ...

(◕◕)... So deserving of being their Qiang Qing Ci DaRen.

But... how did it turn into Qiang Qing Ci comforting her?

Qiang Qing Ci sent another WeChat message to her. In a teasing tone, he asked, “Are you satisfied with my answer?”

“Uh-huh...”

“Then, Sheng Sheng,” Qiang Qing Ci said, his voice sparkling with laughter as he lowered it, “do you still owe me something?”

(◕◕) ... Did she?

Uh ... indeed, it seemed she did.

“DaRen... what would you like to listen to?” Fortunately, it was still only the afternoon and nobody was home yet.

“I heard Jue Mei say that you know how to play some instruments?”

Jue Mei? Then that must have been Geng Xiaoxing who told him ...

“A few. I learned the piano as a child. Later, because I liked ancient-style music, I taught myself the guzheng[1] and xiao[2].” Gu Sheng guessed at what Qiang Qing Ci was proposing. “DaRen, you want to listen to me sing and play at the same time?”

“If that’s okay with you.”

It was okay... but she was worried she would not do a very good job.

Gu Sheng hesitated for a few seconds but, in the end, still agreed to do it. She pulled out her laptop, set her microphone beside the piano, cleared her throat slightly, and put on her headset. She then sent a WeChat text message to Qiang Qing Ci: I’m good now. Dada, come to my room.

She did not even have a chance to send over the chat room number before Qiang Qing Ci had already entered the room ...

She never thought he would still remember after only coming once.

She put a password protection on the chat room before clearing her

throat again. “DaRen, what would you like to listen to?”

Qiang Qing Ci’s voice was heard in her headset. “Whatever you are used to singing, that will be fine.”

“Mm... I’ll sing the song that I sang when I was applying to become part of my music association.” Gu Sheng remembered, that particular time, she had also sung and played at the same time, so she was especially familiar with this song and did not need to look at the music. Exhaling anxiously, she confessed, “I’m a little nervous. I might hit some wrong notes ...”

After recalling the song in her mind for a moment, she began to play the musical introduction.

The piano accompaniment for this type of ancient-style song did not attempt to showcase technique; it only needed to be kept simple and clean.

Ultimately, it still depended on the quality of the singer’s voice.

The introduction came to an end, and Gu Sheng began singing the lyrics: [\[\[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncajM9PjRQs\]\]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ncajM9PjRQs)

“The blowing sand disperses, disturbing the clear sky. His loyal heart shining only for his bright moon [his Lord]

Looking into the distance, beyond the city, where weapon is meeting weapon  
Another calamity in this floating life

The ruler, guarding the palace alone; his stateliness no longer like that of yesterday. Who is that weeping here?

Old friend has always been faithfully standing in front of his Lord, never questioning, never complaining .....

Old friend, hair now snowy, marked by the vicissitudes of life, never once demanding the chance to re-make his choice  
Hoping only that his Lord would put away warfare; something that even offering up his head would not be able to exchange  
Ultimately, the city walls have been broken open; looking out from on high is a sea of smoke and fire

Powerless to do anything; corpses strewn everywhere; old friend's heart has left for some place afar.

.....”

She was playing and singing at the same time and could not allow herself to be distracted. Vaguely, she seemed to hear Qiang Qing Ci laugh lightly and state the name of the song: “Gu Ren Tan [Sigh of the Old Friend].”

\*

[1] Orig. 古筝. Chinese zither with 16 or more strings.

[2] Orig. 箫. Chinese vertical, end-blown flute. Usually made of bamboo.

\*

#### Additional Comments:

Like I had mentioned in my last post, this is the first edition of the novel. For those who are curious, in the revised edition, instead of singing Sigh of the Old Friend, Sheng Sheng actually only hums a lyric-less melody to her own piano accompaniment.

Okay, did anyone catch that little bit about Toupai knowing that Sheng Sheng knows how to play multiple instruments? Sure, Geng Xiaoxing could have happened to tell Jue Mei, who could have just happened to tell Toupai, but I personally like to think that Toupai asked Jue Mei to find out more about Sheng Sheng from Geng Xiaoxing. :) I did a full translation of this song. As before, first, here is my interpretation of the song 故人叹 Gu Ren Tan [Sigh of the Old Friend] followed by the translation of the lyrics: An ambitious ruler with remarkable military prowess wants to rule the world. He has an old friend who, shoulder to shoulder, fought with him and supported him to his current position. Where the ruler is willing to use war and upheaval to expand his conquest of the world, his friend wants only the end of warfare and peace for the common people. However, old friend's words fall on deaf ears, so he chooses to take his leave and lead a life away from the conflict. The constant war has taken a

toll on the people, and the ruler has lost the heart of the common folk. Amidst domestic unrest and foreign aggression, the ruler is abandoned by those who had once followed him. As the gates fall and the foreign army surrounds the city, the ruler ascends the city walls. Old friend has returned to take up his position one last time beside his Lord, as the ruler unsheathes his sword and commits suicide.

[0:47] 风沙漫延, 扰乱晴天, 丹心照明月

The blowing sand disperses, disturbing the clear sky. His loyal heart shining only for his bright moon [his Lord]

[0:54] 遥望城外, 兵器相见, 浮生又一劫

Looking into the distance, beyond the city, where weapon is meeting weapon. Yet another calamity in this floating life [1:01] 君独守皇宫已非昨日威严, 谁在此哽咽

The ruler, guarding the palace alone; his stateliness no longer like that of yesterday. Who is that weeping here?

[1:08] 故人一直就站在君的面前, 不问也不怨

Old friend has always been faithfully standing in front of his Lord, never questioning, never complaining [1:15] 君本意欲, 寿与天齐, 留万代功名

His Lord had intended that his lifespan would be equal to Heaven, his achievements marked in history for ten thousand generations [1:22] 故人西辞, 不问情意, 有何难说明

Old friend takes leave, turning his back to friendship. How difficult this is to explain.

[1:29] 打乱了君一统天下的约定, 谁可以同行

Upsetting the agreement with his Lord to rule the world together. Now who can walk this journey with him?

[1:36] 原来不需要用战争去平定, 要先得人心

Originally, war had not been needed to bring stability. What was needed was to gain the heart of the people.

[1:43] 故人，发已衰白，风尘覆盖，不奢求重来

Old friend, hair now snowy, marked by the vicissitudes of life, never once demanding the chance to re-make his choice [1:50] 只盼君能收起战台，断头换不来

Hoping only that his Lord would put away warfare; something that even offering up his head would not be able to exchange [1:57] 最后的城墙破开，登高望海，一片烟火海

Ultimately, the city walls are broken open; looking out from on high is a sea of smoke and fire [2:04] 无能为力，尸遍满地，故人心已远

Powerless to do anything; corpses strewn everywhere. Old friend's heart is gone afar.

[2:25] 君本意欲，寿与天齐，留万代功名

His Lord had intended that his lifespan would be equal to Heaven, his achievements marked in history for ten thousand generations [2:33] 故人西辞，不问情意，有何难说明

Old friend takes leave, turning his back to friendship. How difficult this is to explain.

[2:40] 打乱了君一统天下的约定，谁可以同行

Upsetting the agreement with his Lord to rule the world together. Now who can walk this journey with him?

[2:47] 原来不需要用战争去平定，要先得人心

Originally, war had not been needed to bring stability. What was needed was to gain the heart of the people.

[2:53] 故人，发已衰白，风尘覆盖，不奢求重来

Old friend, hair now snowy, marked by the vicissitudes of life, never once demanding the chance to re-make his choice [3:01] 只盼君能收起战台，断头换不来

Hoping only that his Lord would put away warfare; something that even offering up his head would not be able to exchange [3:07] 最后的城墙破



开，登高望海，一片烟火海

Ultimately, the city walls are broken open; looking out from on high is a sea of smoke and fire [3:15] 无能为力，尸遍满地，故人心已远

Powerless to do anything; corpses strewn everywhere. Old friend's heart is gone afar.

[3:23] 手一挥，膝一跪，拿玉杯赐天下无罪

A flourish of his arm; one knee kneels to the ground. A jade cup raised to declare the innocence of the world [the common people]

[3:30] 没有人，喊万岁，只有故人看君落泪

No one to declare, "Long live my Lord." Only old friend there, watching his Lord's tears fall [3:37] 君萧萧，拔剑鞘，还以为就此一了百了

Lord is desolate. His sword is drawn from the scabbard, thinking that all troubles will end here [with death]

[3:44] 人在生，责在身，与谁同归都不可能

In life, when borne down by the weight of responsibility, it is not possible to walk out your path with anyone.

[3:49] 故人，发已衰白，风尘覆盖，不奢求重来

Old friend, hair now snowy, marked by the vicissitudes of life, never once demanding the chance to re-make his choice [3:57] 只盼君能收起战台，断头换不来

Hoping only that his Lord would put away warfare; something that even offering up his head would not be able to exchange [4:04] 最后的城墙破开，登高望海，一片烟火海

Ultimately, the city walls are broken open; looking out from on high is a sea of smoke and fire [4:12] 无能为力，尸遍满地，故人心已远

Powerless to do anything; corpses strewn everywhere. Old friend's heart is gone afar.

## Chapter 12: Poached “Pearls” with Conch (3)

“Hmm... Our Toupai’s golden master really has such a nice voice.”

Out of nowhere, a familiar-sounding voice threw out this teasing sentence.

Gu Sheng was so startled she hit several wrong notes. She wanted to look over to see who had entered the chat room, but she still needed to finish off what was yet unfinished.

“Oh yes,” Dou Dou Dou Bing sighed lightly. “That vibrato sounds sooooo nice.”

“Pure and natural. No additional fancy embellishment needed.” Jue Mei Sha Yi was also slowly savoring what he was hearing. “This indeed is the voice Qiang Qing Ci loves the most.”

.....

Gu Sheng honestly could not keep singing anymore.

She stopped abruptly and discovered that seven or eight people had actually come into her locked chat room! Furthermore... they had all been given channel administrator rights...

Wwwwk?!

Feng Ya Song?!

Dou Dou Dou Bing??!!

Fei Shao??!!

Jue Mei Sha Yi???!!

Geng Xiaoxing???!!

And nearly all of them were online using their mobile phones ...

Gu Sheng was completely stupefied.

“Um, well ... “ Feng Ya Song very, very politely explained, “Qiang Qing

Ci Dada, Sheng Sheng Man Dada, I'm mortified to have disturbed your date ... It was Dou Dou Dou Bing who told me to come."

Dou Dou Dou Bing: "Fei Shao told me to come."

Fei Shao: "It wasn't me. Wwwwk was the one who notified me."

Wwwwk: "I'm eating hot pot with Jue Mei right now..."

Jue Mei: "..... I'm messaging with Geng Xiaoxing on WeChat. Sheng Sheng, you get what I mean..."

.....

Of course, nothing else needed to be said. Geng Xiaoxing was her channel's orange horse.

She must have one by one given all of them administrator status and sold her out. T T

And then ... she had ended up surrounded by a circle of onlookers.

Geng Xiaoxing, in a very grovelling tone, sent a private message to her: You know ... Jue Mei asked and I didn't dare say no.

"Sheng Sheng ..." Feng Ya Song complained resentfully, "Toupai is so selfish ... He kept kicking us out. I didn't get to hear the whole song. It kept cutting in and out ..."

Dou Dou Dou Bing also felt Qiang Qing Ci was being extremely unkind. "It was such a back-and-forth battle. He would kick us out nonstop, and we would come back in nonstop..... All we wanted to do was watch from the sidelines to see how Toupai has a date..."

.....

The whole time, Qiang Qing Ci had not spoken.

Gu Sheng felt that she needed to clarify the situation. "Actually... It's... um..." How should I say it? That Toupai asked me to sing? And so I sang? But why did Toupai ask me to sing?..... I don't know either...

Gu Sheng was not doing well... Faced with this bunch of experienced CVs, who were all very capable of poking fun at people, this little cover

singer's responses were just too pathetic.

Thankfully, Qiang Qing Ci cleared his throat and turned on his microphone. "Sheng Sheng and I had a bet." Qiang Qing Ci's voice finally seemed to have completely warmed up and was back in its top form. "She lost, so she needed to sing for me."

Um ... We did? ...

His unique bass voice carried over through her headphones.

Bass voice, bass voice, bass voice, bass voice. Why was there that loving, affectionate feel in it? Because his bass voice was unequaled by anyone, ah ..... Gu Sheng quietly allowed herself to indulge in his voice while, at the same time, sighing over how even Toupai's fibs had more dramatic feel in them than the truth...

Alright ... let's just say we did.

She thought this excuse sounded rather reasonable.

"... Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen, next time when you make a bet, can you call me, too? I'm your diehard fan now, eh? How come this treat of getting to sing for DaRen doesn't include me?" Dou Dou Dou Bing started to tease him again.

"Forget it." Feng Ya Song jumped in with a "hee hee," and reminded her, "Each time Ling Long Ti Tou records a new song, she'll privately message Toupai. You think our perfect Toupai is lacking in songs to listen to?"

.....

Indeed, there was always gossip to listen to when hanging out in Toupai's inner circle of old friends.

Gu Sheng very shamelessly admitted that she really liked listening to gossip ...

"Ling Long Ti Tou has the mature and strong type of voice," Dou Dou Dou Bing mulled. "I suspect that's not Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen's style; otherwise, how come after so many years, they still haven't hooked up? ..."

“Nuh-uh. Wrong.” Jue Mei cleared his throat before continuing with a show of seriousness, “Ling Long Ti Tou is too tall. Qiang Qing Ci doesn’t like girls who are really tall ...”

Fei Shao was delighting in this. “Dou Bing, it’s over for you. You’re over 170 [cm] ...”

“Say any more and I’m going to fight you ...” Dou Dou Dou Bing let out a couple of quiet sobs. “All the 180 men have been taken by the 160 girls ... Eh? Sheng Sheng, how tall are you?”

“Me?” Gu Sheng replied honestly, “162 ...”

“Oooh, Qiang Qing Ci’s ideal height ...” Feng Ya Song added at the appropriate time.

.....

Jue Mei sidled up to the microphone, unable to hold back his complaints. “Toupai and I live in the same apartment. We’re only separated by two doors. But when I wanted to listen to Sheng Sheng sing, I had to ask Sheng Sheng’s schoolmate ... Oh, sigh ... I’m the purple horse, but I really have no authority ...”

Gu Sheng was taken aback and only now remembered that Jue Mei and Qiang Qing Ci were roommates ...

It seemed the veteran members of Wanmei all had a common hobby: poke fun at Toupai...

And then Toupai would always give the same response: silence...

After knowing her for more than a month now and they had become acquainted with one another, they were starting to include Gu Sheng in the teasing. With no fans around, there were absolutely no limits to what they said, and there were all sorts of hints and alluding. Yes, this was the 2-D world, and she could treat all of those as friendly joking, but she honestly felt really embarrassed. Gu Sheng very intensely felt that her skin was being rubbed down until it was getting thinner and thinner ...

A commotion suddenly could be heard in the background of someone’s

microphone.

Then, Wwwwk, who had not really participated in the chatter, cried out, “Hey, Toupai has made an appearance.”

Jue Mei had turned on the microphone to the room, so right then, it was picking up all three of their voices. Soon, they heard Jue Mei say, “I just remembered, you finished a 36-hour shift. How come you woke up after only 3 hours of sleep? And you actually had the mood to listen to singing?” Those words must have been addressed to Toupai.

“Hungry.” Qiang Qing Ci was relatively farther away from the microphone, and his voice could only be faintly heard.

Jue Mei laughed, “All that’s left is veggie leaves. I’ll go get you another box of meat.”

Qiang Qing Ci gave a reply in acknowledgement, and then there was the sound of chairs being moved. He should be sitting at the table now? “Veggie leaves are fine. There’s still a box of shrimp in the fridge.” He paused briefly before, in an unhurried voice, he reminded the other two men, “There’s been avian flu going around lately.”

Wwwwk: “Cr\*p! ... Forgot about that.”

As Gu Sheng listened in on all this, she felt as if she was listening to a radio drama. Her mind instantly sketched out a picture of two men glaring angrily at Toupai while also regretting that they had eaten meat ... And the other man ... Mm ... Toupai DaRen, his expression thick with sleepiness, was throwing shrimp in to be cooked ...

“I’ll say, you three men are being rather inconsiderate,” Dou Dou Dou Bing protested. “There are three women and two men here who haven’t eaten yet ...”

“How’s it inconsiderate?” Jue Mei moved closer to the microphone and reminded Dou Bing, “When Toupai is hungry, it’s scary... Let him finish eating and then we’ll keep having fun. Be good.”

Dou Dou Dou Bing gave a “hmp” but gave in. “Fine...” She was quiet for several seconds but then, out of the blue, she grew excited. “Sheng

Sheng, Sheng Sheng; Toupai, Toupai; Jue Mei, Jue Mei; Feng Ya, Feng Ya. Weibo, Weibo...”

She could not even make a complete sentence...

But because she was so excited, everyone else got excited as well.

Besides gossip, the only thing that could cause Dou Dou Dou Bing to be like this was ... still gossip.

Nearly everyone did the exact same action: pick up his or her phone or computer and open up Weibo.

When Gu Sheng opened up the page in the browser, her computer nearly froze.

The number of @ was astonishing.

This time, she was smarter and immediately headed over to Toupai's Weibo ...

Someone had posted one of those chain tweets that was currently a fad on Weibo:

If @QiangQingCi @JueMeiShaYi @Wwwwk are willing to repost this Weibo tweet, I will send a postcard from Japan to everyone who comments below this post! If my biggest, most beloved idol @QiangQingCi reposts this! And also reveals whose voice he loves the most! I will send a box of chocolates to everyone who comments below this post!!!!

The post was tweeted three minutes ago ...

Theoretically, the three people who had been @ were all in the same room having hot pot, and no one should have noticed anything.

But ...

Qiang Qing Ci surprisingly... actually... used his mobile phone to repost it: Thanks for the generosity. @ShengShengMan

# Chapter 13: Poached “Pearls” with Conch

## (4)

Gu Sheng’s cheeks instantly started burning. They were honestly burning up...

And, because of the frantic reposting of the Weibo tweet, her computer crashed...

All the voices disappeared.

Gu Sheng took two breaths to help herself recuperate before hurriedly rebooting her computer.

However, just as she pressed the button to do a hard restart, her dad and mom returned home. “Sheng Sheng, hurry and go take over for your cousin. He’s going to be late for his matchmaking date. After your dad and I finish dinner, we’ll go to the grocery store and relieve you so you can come back and eat.”

In that brief moment, Gu Sheng thought of countless excuses, even going so far to consider flopping down, rolling around, and declaring that she had a stomachache from hunger. Unfortunately, her mother immediately saw through her ploy. Without even glancing at her, she waved her hand and stated, “Don’t even think about pretending to be sick. Our family grocery store is right across from the hospital. If you really are sick, then it’ll be on the way.” Mom took off her coat and headed into the kitchen, not even giving her the slightest chance to resist.

She had no choice but to hastily throw on her coat, grab her mobile phone, and head out.

She, as the owner of the chat room, had suddenly vanished while the room was still occupied by numerous big-name CVs...

As she ran downstairs, she rushed back online onto YY using her mobile phone while, in passing, also silently mourning that her data usage this month was definitely going to exceed quota. However, to her surprise, when she entered her room, everyone was gone already.



It had only been a few minutes... But that made sense. Toupai was eating with Jue Mei and Wwwwk, and it was dinnertime now, so she reckoned that everyone else had also headed off to fill their stomachs.

But ...

She touched a hand to her cheek.

It was still burning hot.

Strictly speaking, she should be classified as someone who was collaborating with Toupai rather than just simply a fan, and she should be very rational in regards to the various sorts of jesting and teasing that was commonplace in this entertainment circle. What was the big deal? Honestly, nothing. Even in her own music association, all those shouts and declarations of coupledness and official pairing – whether they be boy-boy, boy-girl, girl-girl – were in the end, merely close friendships, k?

And anyway, Toupai had only said that he liked her voice, right? ...

Gu Sheng tried her best to cool down while proceeding step by step down the stairs. In the end, after some contemplation, she decided that she should definitely express her appreciation to Toupai, considering he was throwing his support behind her like that. After all, having Toupai's recommendation was better than her covering even a thousand songs.

Before unlocking her bicycle, she typed a WeChat message to Toupai: Thank you, Dada for your praise and great kindness.

Her key stabbed into the lock, turned, and opened it.

Toupai had already sent back a voice recording: "You're welcome. I'm still eating dinner, and it's not too convenient to type. Can we use voice messages?"

She sent back: "Sure. My computer crashed just now, and that's why I left the chat room. Um... Now, something urgent has come up, so I have to leave the house. Sorry about that, Qiang Qing Ci Dada."

"Alright." His voice was nonchalant.

Gu Sheng then climbed onto her bicycle, but on the way, she heard an

alert from her mobile phone again.

She pulled it out slightly to glance at the screen. Toupai?

Worried that he might need something, she immediately set her feet down on the edge of the pedestrian walk, came to a stop, and pulled out her phone.

Qiang Qing Ci had sent another voice message: "So... that means you owe me how many more songs again?"

.....

... I guess so...

Well, since he liked to listen to her sing ... there really was no reason for her to act reserved. She normally participated in many activities in YY anyway, and after singing and singing some more, she was used to it by now. And besides, Qiang Qing Ci was truly very ... um, good to her.

She promised, "Okay. No problem. If Dada, you are not bored of listening to me, feel free to come find me any time."

Qiang Qing Ci seemed to hear the background noise of the street. "You're on the road?"

Gu Sheng: "Mm-hmm. Riding my bike."

"Alright then. No more talking." Qiang Qing Ci was eating leisurely, and his words were slightly unclear. "Remember to be safe."

What a considerate Toupai DaRen...

Gu Sheng exhaled lightly. "Okay. Bye, DaRen."

As she slipped her phone back into her pants pocket, she could not help sighing over Toupai's voice, which, even when eating, sounded so seductively laidback...

She made herself settle down, but as she continued on her way on her bicycle, she suddenly remembered something very important...

Toupai was indeed still eating dinner... And he was eating it with Jue Mei and Wwwwk. So, those two had listened in on her entire conversation

with Toupai, down to all the details, without any omissions.

They had not really said anything, but still... Her cheeks reddened.

Gu Sheng thought about the Weibo tweet that had been forwarded so many times that her computer crashed, and then she switched over to mull back on what she and Toupai had talked about, wondering if there had been anything inappropriate that should not have been heard by other people... Pondering back and forth like this all along the way, she finally managed to dawdle her way to the grocery store, where Cousin was already waiting impatiently for her.

When he saw her lock up her bicycle and enter the store, he immediately ran out from behind the counter and stared at her resentfully. "My dear little sister, if you were any later, I'd be yelled at by my bros."

"I knew it! I knew for sure that you weren't going on a matchmaking date." Gu Sheng walked over to stand behind the counter. "Going to play 'Sword 3'?"

Cousin bowed in thanks to her as he dashed out the door. Unlocking his bicycle, he rode away in a crazy rush.

It was dinnertime. She only needed to hold down the fort for one hour, which was also the most leisurely hour.

Inside the store, there was only herself and a new girl who had just been hired on after the Lunar New Year. The girl had only been working for about two or three days, and Gu Sheng had only seen her once prior to today. She remembered her name was Dong Yiru, and she looked about the same age as her. Gu Sheng exchanged a couple sentences of idle chat with her before trying to open up her Weibo account again. It was still frozen ... Dong Yiru was organizing the shelves while listening to music, and because there were no customers in the store, every now and then, she would send out a WeChat message.

Gu Sheng was still trying hard to fix her frozen account ...

Then, she suddenly heard Dong Yiru say "uh-huh" and speak in a low

tone into her mobile phone's WeChat app. "I'm going to cry soon, you know? My most beloved idol just declared twenty minutes ago who his favourite voice is ... I honestly want to bawl! At work now. Talk more tonight!"

.....

Really? What was the chance? ...

She did not dare keep refreshing anymore and immediately logged out of Weibo instead, for fear that Dong Yiru would see her Weibo screen name and her 2-D world identity would be exposed. She stuffed her mobile phone into her pants pocket and, without anything else to do, started to stand idly by the checkout counter and stare at the main doors of the hospital in the distance.

Her belly ... was a little hungry.

For some reason, she thought of the vegetables and shrimp that Toupai was eating. Thinking of food right now was truly torture.

She glanced outside, then around the store, and lastly at the time on the screen of her phone. Coughing lightly, she asked, "Yiru, have you eaten yet?"

"Nope. When your dad and mom come, I'll get off work with you, and then I'll take care of dinner."

Gu Sheng responded with an "mm-hmm."

(◕v◕) How come her conscience was feeling guilty?

"Sheng Sheng," Dong Yiru, who had finished tidying the shelves and was now walking over to the checkout counter, asked curiously, "do you have a seiyuu[1] that you like?"

"Um... you mean the seiyuus who do the voice acting for Japanese anime?" Gu Sheng coughed again. "Yup. I like watching anime ... But I never really paid attention to the seiyuu. They all sound nice ..."

Dong Yiru beamed at her. "What about Chinese voice actors?"

"As in dubbed movies? ... I rather like them." Gu Sheng tried to as much

as possible to sound as if she was not the least bit into the 2-D world. Otherwise, if she gave herself away, the girl might ask her for her online ID or to follow each other in Weibo or something like that, which would be bad. “When I was a kid, I also liked radio DJs.”

“Actually, there are many very nice-sounding voices on the Internet,” Dong Yiru told her intently. “Also, in a lot of TV dramas, you see the actors talking, but in reality, it’s not their real voices. They use voice actors to dub over ...”

Gu Sheng felt as if her heart was dripping blood. “Uh-huh.”

Luckily, oh so luckily, singers’ and voice actors’ voices sounded completely different through the microphone compared to their real, live voices.

Luckily, oh so luckily ... Otherwise, even if she started pretending now that she was a mute, it would already be too late ...

Seeing that she did not seem very interested, Dong Yiru did not say much more.

All of a sudden, the beep sound of an incoming WeChat message was heard, and furthermore, both of them received the same alert within less than one second of each other.

Gu Sheng picked up her mobile phone ... It was ... a voice message ... from Toupai ...

She wondered what he had said in it. Fourteen seconds long. She stared at her phone in silence for three seconds, but then put it away again ... She absolutely did not dare listen to it, k? DaRen, why send a voice message? But what if it’s urgent? It’s not that I don’t want to return your message. Absolutely not. It’s just that, your fan is right in front of me, less than a metre away, just on the other side of the counter, you know? ...

Wordlessly, she suffered through and restrained herself. While her heart was dripping blood agonizingly, Dong Yiru had already casually tapped on her message and opened it up. Over from her side, the sound of her good friend’s voice could be heard. “I know you’re at work right now,

but I feel that, this time, it's really a huge deal! Did you know, did you know?! Just ten minutes ago! Toupai reposted our song! That one of ours from ten days ago! The one that we made to celebrate the seven year anniversary of the release of his first work!"

Dong Yiru let out a thrilled squeal but then hurriedly glanced over at Gu Sheng.

Gu Sheng quickly shook her head. "I don't mind... There's no customers right now anyway..."

Sure enough, a diehard fan. To even remember the exact release date of Toupai's very first online voice acting project ... @@~

When she got home later, she was going to have to have a listen to see what kind of song it was ...

Another message followed very closely behind the first, and Dong Yiru did not hesitate to open it up. Gu Sheng figured, she probably thought that Gu Sheng did not understand what was being said anyway, so she did not care.

Gu Sheng listened in curiously, suspecting that this message likely had to do with Toupai as well.

Indeed...

"Let me catch my breath for a sec before I tell you a piece of heartbreaking news... When Toupai reposted our song... Remember we wrote a sentence wishing Toupai that he would find his golden master soon?! Toupai said..... Gawd, let me take another deep breath..." On that end, that person actually did gulp in a large breath of air before carrying on, "Toupai wrote back – let's see, one, two, three, four, five, six – six words: 'Thank you. I'm working on it.' Listen carefully! Not 'will work on it' but 'work-ING on it.' Meaning currently in progress! I'm willing to bet a cartload of cucumbers that it's definitely Sheng Sheng Man!

"I'll up the stakes with another cart of cucumbers..." Dong Yiru replied dejectedly, looking at and speaking into her mobile phone. "Definitely Sheng Sheng Man."

[1]声优. Japanese term for voice actor.

# Chapter 14: Poached “Pearls” with Conch

## (5)

.....

Actually ... that sentence of Toupai’s was honestly very innocent.

Don’t think too much into it.

Gu Sheng was instructing herself silently.

The doors of the grocery store suddenly slid open.

Two customers had come in. Dong Yiru hastily put away her mobile phone and with a show of seriousness, put on the look of a worker doing her job conscientiously. Gu Sheng’s hands were in her pants pocket, and she very restlessly flipped her phone over and over again inside, wondering what Toupai had said to her in his message.

Gu Sheng, stay calm ...

Toupai is the perfect Toupai. He crossed over into being a commercial voice acting celebrity a long time ago.

Gu Sheng, stay calm ...

He actually didn’t really say anything at all. Besides, even if there was some sort of meaning in what he said, it has nothing to do with you.

Breathe, breathe. Can’t stay calm at all, you know?...

Sure enough, you should not mingle too much with famous people. Even she, someone who already floated around part-time in the 2-D world, was starting to have teenage girl feelings sprout in her heart and silly thoughts that were all over the place... She pulled her mobile phone out again and tapped it absentmindedly against the counter. So, with her mind in a mess and her heart hanging anxiously in her throat, she served another dozen or so customers until her dad finally arrived after finishing dinner to take over the shift from her.

She quickly handed over the work and, shouting backwards hastily that



she was hungry, dashed out of the store.

Outside, beside the glass window, she immediately pulled out her mobile phone and tapped on Toupai's voice message.

"I just finished a 36-hour shift, and I'm guessing I'll sleep until the middle of the night, to about one o'clock or so." Toupai's voice was thick with fatigue. He was not speaking loudly and sounded like he was just casually talking with her. "If you need anything, leave me a message. I'll get it when I wake up."

He had not been speaking hurriedly. Exactly 14 seconds long.

And then, the voice message ended.

"Gu Sheng?" Someone unexpectedly stretched her head out to look over in her direction. "Why haven't you left yet? Not hungry?"

Gu Sheng was completely startled and instinctively jammed her mobile phone into her jacket pocket. "Looking for the key to my bike lock..."

So lucky ... She had been listening through the ear receiver just now ...

But her heart was still beating irregularly, in fear that she would be found out by this true, hardcore fan of Toupai.

She decided in her mind that from now on, she needed to get into the habit of using a headset. Must do! Definitely required! ...

"Over here." With a smile Dong Yiru picked up a key from the ground. "You must have dropped it when you grabbed your phone out. Gu Sheng, your face is... um, really red." When she finished saying this, she gave Gu Sheng a meaningful look.

Pretending to be oblivious, Gu Sheng gave a "huh?" and exchanged a couple more perfunctory sentences with her before fleeing her bicycle.

Back home, she pulled out her re-warmed dinner to eat while opening up her Weibo.

In slightly over an hour, the tweet had been reposted more than 2000 times, and the number of comments in reply was almost equal to that as well. Just the private messages alone that had been sent to her were

totaling more than several dozen... Needless to say, they of course all contained remarks similar to the ones Dong Yiru had made. She debated with herself over whether she should respond with a formal and proper “Thank you, DaRen,” or just pretend until the end of time that she did not even exist. She decisively chose the latter.

And then ... she changed her Weibo to forbid comments.

Sigh

She truly could foresee that for a very long time, this entertainment circle was going to have all sorts of disdain and snubs directed at her.

She wordlessly recalled how this had all started: Simply, early one morning, she had been in her own chat room when she heard Qiang Qing Ci’s voice. Then, she had mentioned Wanmei Voice Acting Group and Toupai Daren to Geng Xiaoxing ... And then, like fool’s luck, they had begun working together... And then, in a mere two months, which had contained a New Year’s holiday and a winter break in between, she found herself hugging this whole lot of thighs ...

Gu Sheng silently took a bite of her chicken drumstick.

She remembered Toupai’s words: when you shut off your computer, the 2-D world becomes nothing...

Mm. Becomes nothing...

Toupai DaRen, you didn’t deliberately say that right before starting to promote me as a singer in order to help prep me for what was to come, did you?

She continued to nibble on her drumstick, closing all the private messages from people whom she was not familiar with. Even her good friends, she only replied with a quick smiley face. The last message was from the president of her music association, who very calmly left his thoughts: Don’t think that just because you’ve hooked up with Toupai, you don’t have to pay off your debts. Tonight, you had better send me back “Shi Zi Fu” [The Prince’s Poem]. Remember: in a false male voice!

.....

.....

.....

.....

Gu Sheng felt very dejected. What kind of taste was that?! What kind of taste in music?!

You want a male voice, go find yourself a man to sing, k? T T

Given her mood tonight, her voice would sound floaty for sure. How could she make it sound like a romantic, seductive young nobleman? She might just end up sounding like a vulgar little boy..... Especially since she needed to sing...

Gu Sheng: Mr. President, could you please find a guy?

Association president: Your organization needs you, Sheng Sheng Man!

Gu Sheng: .....

Association president: I told Zou Diao'er to sing it as a duet with you. One will be gong and the other, shou.[1]

Gu Sheng: .....

Association president: You'll be the 'gong!'

Gu Sheng: .....

Although her inbox had thirty to forty or so songs that she still owed, this was a song debt to her own association. She could not hide from it, even if she tried.

After doing some organizing, she settled herself in and started. In her own room, while listening to the accompaniment, she practiced, practiced, and practiced some more ... Such a difficult type of style to sing and so damaging to her vocal cords. And it had to be a gong voice, too ... She muddled up the lyrics numerous times and suffered into the middle of the night before she finally managed to submit her vocal recording. By now, her voice was already raspy. She sent off the recording in an email and then private messaged the association president. When she checked

the time, it was nearly 12:30 a.m.

The sound insulation in her home was pretty good. Should she try to pay off ... another singing debt?

She cleared her throat tentatively and could tell there was no chance of that happening.

Now, in this time when she had nothing to do but was also not feeling the least bit drowsy, she suddenly received another private message.

She had thought it would be the association president, but unexpectedly, it turned out to be ... Toupai.

Qiang Qing Ci: Mm. Awake now.

As she stared at those three words, she felt an unexplainable sense of ... nervousness, like she was afraid of being found out.

She mulled over her response for quite a while before finally sending something back.

Gu Sheng: A 36-hour shift must be very tiring, right? DaRen, do you need to have a drink of water or something and then go back to sleep?

Qiang Qing Ci: Mm. Checking emails right now.

Toupai was trying to say, he was busy?

While Gu Sheng was contemplating whether she should keep bothering him, Qiang Qing Ci had already sent another message: Busy?

Gu Sheng: shaking head Just finished with nothing to do now. Just handed in a song.

Qiang Qing Ci: Oh? Which one?

Gu Sheng: ..... "The Prince's Poem" sung in a false male voice.....

Qiang Qing Ci: LOL

Gu Sheng: .....

After a few seconds, he sent over a longer message.

Qiang Qing Ci: Lying drunken on the beauty's knee; awaken to hold the

control of the nation in my palm? Wine may not have intoxicated me for I have intoxicated myself? A warm canopied bed and covers? How could it be a crime to embrace one on my left and encircle another in my right arm? Attracting a beauty's affection can lead to exhaustion, exhaustion, exhaustion?

Gu Sheng looked fixedly at the screen. DaRen really knew how to make his selections. The most suggestive lines in the song were all written right there...

At this moment, in the quiet of the night, she actually only needed to look at these lines of text and then her mind was able to conjure up Toupai's voice reciting them. And, particularly because she had just spent several hours recording the song, even the background music was resonating crystal clear in her mind, you know...?

Simply ... too vivid a mental picture ... T T

She struggled over her reply: Mm-hmm ... That one.

Qiang Qing Ci: The lyrics are pretty amusing. Just looked it up on Baidu.

Gu Sheng: Uh-huh. Pretty amusing. O(∩\_∩)O Haha~

She cleared her throat again. It was still very hoarse.

Unexpectedly, the next second, Qiang Qing Ci's reply came: Next time, don't sing in a false male voice. It's very damaging to the voice.

.....

Gu Sheng stared at the screen in a daze.

DaRen .... You said ... That one sentence, where you said you liked my voice the most ...

You weren't serious ... Were you?

\*

[1] Just a recap of slang terms we had introduced in earlier chapters: 攻 or 'gong' is slang term used for the more stereotypical domineering half

in a boy-love relationship while 受 or 'shou' is the more effeminate half. So here, the association president is telling Sheng Sheng that she needs to be the more manly voice in the duet while Zou Diao'er (who is really a guy) will sing more submissively and gently.

\*

Additional comments:

Would it shock you if I told you, the version of 世子赋 Shi Zi Fu [The Prince's Poem] is actually sung by... a woman?! I'm not joking! This is the cover recommended by Mo Bao Fei Bao herself, sung in a false male voice. The singer is 『Asdv, an online female artiste known for her ability to impersonate male voices. Even though it's not my type of song, it's worth listening through to the end just to hear how she handles the male voice. The link I gave in the Youtube comment box is where she posted the song in her official 5sing account.

This song was written for, I believe, a character from a BL romance novel series. I thought about not doing a full translation for it. I don't know what the novels are about, so without context, I had to make my best interpretation of some of the lines in the song. If this song is indeed written with BL in mind, then maybe all the "she" can be replaced with a "he"? I'll confess the translation is a little loose. In the end, here's my rough translation so you can get an idea of what kind of (embarrassing!) song Sheng Sheng sang.

[0:01] 有道是人不风流枉少年

So it is said: If you are not amorous when you are young, you have wasted away your youth

[0:09] 风流少年时 笑看浮生变

In those amorous youthful years, watching with a smile as life changes

[0:13] 神仙府里赛神仙 谈笑江湖间

In the deity's manor competing against deities, happily conversing among the land of the river and lakes

[0:17] 醉卧美人膝 醒掌天下权

Lying drunken on the beauty's knee; awaken to hold the control of the nation in my palm

[0:22] 乱世风云出我辈 金戈峥嵘归

This unstable time produces heroes of this generation that shall return with golden spear [in hand]

[0:26] 玉盏琉璃杯 绫罗飞天绘

There are jade and colorful glass cups and silk curtains flying in the air as if painting a picture

[0:30] 酒不醉人人自醉 暖帐芙蓉被

Wine may not have intoxicated me for I have intoxicated myself in a warm canopied bed and covers

[0:34] 拨花弄柳月 行走无常间

Caressing flowers and toying with the crescent moon as I walk amid this ever-changing life

[0:39] 左拥右抱岂是罪 惹尽芳心也累累累

How could it be a crime to embrace one on my left and encircle another in my right arm? Attracting a beauty's affection can lead to exhaustion, exhaustion, exhaustion!

[0:44] 琴瑟回 轻鸿飞

Qin and se [two traditional Chinese plucked instruments] are answering one another. The goose flies lightly

[0:52] 秋水星眸 幽幽舞衣掩娇媚

With eyes like the limpid autumn waters and stars, a sleeve flourishes to veil a sweetly coquettish face.

[1:01] 桃花儿魅 清风醉

The peach blossoms are charming. The cool breeze is intoxicating

[1:09] 古壁凝尘 芳菲绵绵相思泪

The ancient wall is gathering dust. A fragrance drifts continuously.  
Tears of yearning.

[1:18] 暗流风乍起 修罗意阑珊

An undercurrent is rising to the surface with the wind. The malevolent spirit's intents are coming to an end.

[1:22] 红袖别苑藏玄机 誓忠轩辕王

The beauty's home conceals a mystery. I pledge loyalty to the Yellow Emperor

[1:27] 犹冀凌云志 冥冥眷红尘

Like my lofty ambitions, always concerned about the worldly affairs

[1:31] 庙堂之高伤神事 云龙御平尘

With troubling matters in the imperial court, the ruler oversees the earth

[1:35] 别离伤幽肠 长乐少年狂

Parting is like a wound. [Better to be] always merry in one's wild youth

[1:40] 傲雪霜冷尤清艳 焚梅念故人

The proud snow and cold frost are especially icily beautiful. The blazing plum blossoms are in remembrance of an old friend.

[1:44] 风流徒枉然 世事话无常

Living amorously is in vain. The affairs of the world are constantly changing

[1:48] 痴心未曾两相忆 潇洒为红颜狂狂狂

My smitten heart never was reciprocated, but for the beauty, I willingly am wild, wild, wild

[1:53] 风憔悴 心难慰

The wind is feeble; the heart cannot be consoled

[2:01] 十载春秋 唯守庵外度春晖



For ten years, the warmth of the sun is spent only keeping watch  
outside the nunnery

[2:10] 无尘泪 雨愁倍

The rain's sorrow is multiplied with those dustless tears

[2:19] 万丈红尘如殇笑眼看定王

The things of the world, many and deep, can end as, with a smile, the  
ruler is decided upon

# Chapter 15: Poached “Pearls” with Conch

## (6)

Soon, the private message window started flashing again.

Qiang Qing Ci: Go to the kitchen and get some sesame oil. Swallow just a small amount. It should feel better tomorrow morning.

Gu Sheng: Huh? Does that work?

Qiang Qing Ci: Mm-hmm.

Gu Sheng: nod I’m going right now.

To her, the condition of her voice was of utmost importance.

Although singing the occasional song or two in a false male voice was unlikely to cause any serious negative consequences, since this was Toupai’s suggestion, she knew it was absolutely, unquestionably going to be effective! She fumbled her way to the kitchen. Since it was so late in the night, she did not turn on any lights and only relied on the moonlight as she felt around for the bottle of sesame oil. She opened one bottle after another, sniffing each one, until she finally smelled the strong aroma of sesame oil. Furtively, she took a quick sip.

Dad, Mom... don’t mind me...

When she was finished, she noticed a plate of ingredients on the kitchen table. She leaned forward against the table and examined them for a moment, quickly deducing what was for lunch tomorrow. Satisfied with her conclusion, she slipped back to her own room again.

When she returned, she earnestly reported back to Qiang Qing Ci: DaRen, I just finished drinking some.

Qiang Qing Ci: smile

Her mouth right now was filled with the scent of sesame oil, so fragrant it could overpower people.

She thought about her inbox full of singing debts and suddenly felt

anxious. Lots of time was required in practicing and singing lyrics along to music until it sounded good, and then she still needed to find a time when her voice was in good form in order to record the vocals track... T T How did she manage to accept more than forty song requests? At this rate, she was going to be paying off these commitments all the way until next year's winter break...

Qiang Qing Ci: Typing's a little tiring. Do you mind using QQ voice chat?

She had still been adding up in her mind how many songs she was going to have to record when this line of text... caused her heart to jump. It was late, but with such a well-insulated room, there would definitely not be any issues with using voice chat. Besides, since she entered into the ancient-style music circle, her parents were used to her recording things in the middle of the night.

But...

Gu Sheng gaped at that row of text again, her breathing still unsteady.

After YY and WeChat... she was now going to get Qiang Qing Ci DaRen's QQ, too?

Why was the world starting to seem so unfathomable and difficult to understand?...

While her eyes were still fixed on the screen in a slight daze, Qiang Qing Ci had already messaged over a string of numbers that was his QQ ID number.

She lightly breathed out and then swiftly added him as a contact in QQ. As she slipped on her headset, her heart inexplicably began to race.

This felt completely different from YY, k?...

In a YY room, even if there were only two people inside, you still felt that it was a public platform. However, QQ voice chat only allowed one-on-one interaction, and no matter how you looked at it, it still felt more personal and private... Plus, in YY, she would always immediately dash off once she was finished singing and would never stay for casual chatting...

In short, this was just very nerve-wracking ...

It was like she was waiting for a personal telephone call from Qiang Qing Ci.

Before long, he was successfully added.

And then, he sent over an invitation to start a voice chat.

Gu Sheng accepted and then immediately became even more nervous.

Normally in WeChat, they took turns sending voice messages. That was completely different from the dialogue that was going to happen now...

"You there?" Qiang Qing Ci suddenly addressed her.

"Huh?" Gu Sheng pressed down on her microphone lightly and adjusted its position. "DaRen, I'm here."

"Continue what you were saying."

Huh?

(☺ o ☺) ..... Continue saying... what?.....

"Ah..... I just went and swallowed some sesame oil..." She looked down contemptuously upon herself. She could not think of a topic at all.

"DaRen, you're not tired anymore?"

With a nonchalant "mm," Qiang Qing Ci answered, "Just woke up. Looking for something to eat now."

His voice was so clear, like he was standing directly in front of her.

Gu Sheng inwardly scorned herself again. How come she was acting like this was the first time she had ever had an online voice chat? ...

It was quiet again.

This wasn't WeChat. Silence was extremely awkward, you know? T T

Gu Sheng was struggling when she suddenly remembered the ingredients she had just seen. "I..... Um, just now, when I was in the kitchen, I saw that my mom had prepped some conch meat... I'll probably be eating poached 'pearls' with conch for lunch tomorrow."

Qiang Qing Ci gave an indistinct “mm.”

It sounded as if some sort of food packaging was being ripped open. Potato chips?

Alright... And then straightaway came the crunching sound of chips being eaten ...

Since DaRen was having a late-night snack, then let her take the lead in the conversation. T T

“I’ve always liked that dish.” Gu Sheng quickly looked up the recipe on Baidu. After finding it, she read it over carefully and processed it into her own words. “You cut the conch into large, rinse them clean in warm water, and put them in a large soup bowl with choy sum that have been blanched in water and Nameko mushrooms. Then you mince some scallions and ginger. After, you add some cooking wine and water to them to make a ginger-scallion liquid.

“And then you prepare the ‘pearls.’ The pearls are actually just chicken meat.

You mince the chicken until it becomes a paste, add egg white and pork fat to it, and then stir them together until they’re well mixed. After that, you can shape them into little balls, maybe one centimeter in diameter or so. Boil some water; then turn down the heat and drop the meatballs in to poach until they’re cooked through. After, you add in sesame oil, MSG, and pepper. And finally, while everything is still hot, you pour it all into the soup bowl with the conch... Um, and then it’s ready to eat.”

She was done talking.

She clearly heard Qiang Qing Ci chuckle a little helplessly. “Mm-hmm, I know. It’s a well known dish in Shandong cuisine.”

.....Okay. No problem... She would treat this as a chance to learn a new recipe...

Qiang Qing Ci gave a little sigh.

And then... very concisely and to the point, he told her, “I think, I’m even

more hungry now.”

He was simply saying a casual statement to her.

Oh God... then what was this immense feeling of guilt that was hitting her?...

“DaRen, I was wrong.” Gu Sheng felt terribly remorseful and, in a sincere tone, said into the headset, “How about... I sing a song for you to make it up to you?”

It seemed singing was the only thing she knew how to do and that Qiang Qing Ci liked?

“Sure,” he laughed.

Gu Sheng’s wordlessly closed her eyes.

Late into the midnight hours, having an online chat with her most beloved idol’s voice...

She was honestly going to die...

Opening up her folder of music, she slowly and carefully searched through it. Finally, she found a song that was on the more soothing side.

She cleared her throat a little bit. It did seem to feel quite a bit better.

This song did not require a great deal of effort to sing, and listening to it... should be very relaxing as well.

She opened up the BGM (background music), and a very ethereal song gradually could be heard. She hummed along with the introduction for a little while before she began singing in a gentle voice:

[[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eN6zgGE2o88>]]

“I have taken my sorrows and brewed them into a bottle of wine for parting  
In the midnight hours, drifting aimlessly in the rain on the mountain  
Past things of the mortal world always shadowing closely behind, leaving behind a song  
If one can become a deity, why would one still be unable to let go?

The eaves you once lived under are now drenched by dew

And accompanying the shadows, they seem to be painted into the distant late autumn scene Shadows cast by candles are agitating, and I mock myself that I am like duckweed swept downstream to the east Call out to the bright moon, and mix its twilight glow in to dilute the sorrows.....”

This was a song that she loved a ton, so she was able to sing it very proficiently. She did not really need to look at the lyrics and still she could smoothly sing it.

Qiang Qing Ci seemed very familiar with this song as well and was able to recognize that it was “Zai Feng Ming Yue Zhao Jiu Zhou” [When the Bright Moon Shines Again Upon the Nine Provinces[1]]. During the interlude, he stated the name of the song and even told her in a gentle voice, “The lyrics of the song contain a poem[2]. I really like it, too.”

Such a low, unhurried voice that seemed to possess a magnetism in it, speaking alongside the interlude...

Gu Sheng was somewhat mesmerized as she listened to him and nearly forgot to sing the second half of the song...

Fortunately, she managed to force herself to recover her professionalism in time and was able to complete the song.

Because it was so late already, when she had finished singing, Toupai told her that she should go to sleep.

Gu Sheng did not really want to, but she still obediently shut off QQ and computer and climbed into bed. All wrapped up in her blankets, she was still thinking about her voice chat with Toupai, which had seemed more like a private phone call. So... now, besides his phone number, she actually was so blessed as to have all of his contact details?

She was somewhat in a state of disbelief...

In this euphoric state of mind, she drifted off to sleep...

When she woke up the next day, it was already eleven o'clock.

It was two days before school was to resume again...

As she groggily sat up in bed, she heard the sounds of cooking coming from the kitchen. Swiftly, she washed up and then turned on her computer. She had just logged into Weibo when she noticed bewilderedly that she had been @ several dozen times again.

A wave of apprehension struck her first, but then after looking at the number of @... Hmm... Shouldn't be Toupai's fans...

This was going to turn into a mental sickness soon...

ㄣ ( ͡ ▽ ͡ ) ㄣ

She opened up the notifications. But she had not anticipated this...

I... I... I... I had my first day of internship at the recording studio today. My first day, ah! And I actually saw my male idol and god, @QiangQingCi! My male god, don't worry; I promised you. I took an oath! I absolutely will not leak any of your photos or info! But can I say something that's true! My male god, you are honestly... TOO! HANDSOME!! K?!!!! T T, Sheng Sheng Man..... I... AM... SO... JEALOUS... OF... YOU!!!! #

\*

[1] Orig. 九州 or 'Jiu Zhou.' Literally means "Nine Provinces." As early as the Shang dynasty, Chinese historical texts have mentioned the "Nine Provinces," although the actual names of the provinces may differ depending on which text is referenced as they also changed through historical time. However, the name "Nine Provinces" symbolically came to represent China as a whole.

[2] The chorus, from 1:40 to 2:01 or so, contains lyrics from the folksong 月儿弯弯照九州 [The Crescent Moons Shines on the Nine Provinces], which originated from the province of Jiangsu.

\*

Additional Comments:

I searched and searched, but there only appears to be one photo on the web for the dish mentioned in this chapter. The pic seems to be a spicier



version than the one Sheng Sheng is talking about. (Sheng Sheng never mentioned chili pepper flakes!) After deliberating on whether I should include the photo, I decided I would, just to make everyone feel hungry with me before I go to bed! Mwahaha!

The song in this chapter, 再逢明月照九州 “Zai Feng Ming Yue Zhao Jiu Zhou” [When the Bright Moon Shines Again on the Nine Provinces] is a sub theme song from an online video game called 寻仙 [Seeking Divinity]. This is a rough translation. (Sorry! The baby hasn't been sleeping well the last few nights which means I've been sleep deprived and surviving off milk tea, unable to think.) [0:31]我将闲愁酿成一壶离别的酒

I have taken my sorrows and brewed them into a bottle of wine for parting [00:38]夜半饮雨飘零在山那头

In the midnight hours, drifting aimlessly in the rain on the mountain [00:45]凡尘旧事如影随形留下词一首

Past things of the mortal world always shadowing closely behind, leaving behind a song [00:51]若成仙 为何不愿放手

If one can become a deity, why would one still be unable to let go?

[00:59]你住过的屋檐而今朝露湿透

The eaves you once lived under are now drenched by dew

[01:05]伴随墨色绘入遥远深秋

And accompanying the shadows, they are painted into the distant late autumn scene [01:12]烛影扰人自嘲身似那浮萍向东流

Shadows cast by candles are agitating, and I mock myself that I am like duckweed swept downstream to the east [01:18]唤明月 融余辉 淡闲愁

Call out to the bright moon, and mix its twilight glow in to dilute the sorrows [01:25]仲夏来临后 卷帘 唱弹 啊.....

As midsummer approaches, roll up the curtains and sing and make music. Ah...

[01:39]月儿弯弯照九州

The crescent moon shines upon the Nine Provinces

[01:46]几家欢乐几家愁

How many are happy? How many are troubled?

[01:53]几家高楼饮美酒

How many are in high pavilions enjoying fine wine?

[02:00]几家流落在呀嘛在街头 在巷口

How many are left living in the streets and alleys?

[02:38]多年之后绒雪吹白你的眉头

Years later, velvety snow has blown onto and whitened your brows

[02:44]与我擦肩城东落枫古井边

We brush shoulders [as we walk by each other] beside the old Luo Feng well on the east side of the city [02:51]你呢喃着我们熟悉的陈词一首

You are murmuring a song, the words familiar to both of us [02:58]陌路人 涌泪也别回头

Now strangers [to each other]. Even if tears are filling the eyes, do not look back [03:04]桨声涟漪中 尘世 依旧 啊.....

Even amid the sounds of the moving oars and rippling waters, the mundane world is still as before. Ah...

[03:19]月儿弯弯照九州

The crescent moon shines upon the Nine Provinces

[03:25]几家欢乐几家愁

How many are happy? How many are troubled?

[03:32]几家高楼饮美酒

How many are in high pavilions enjoying fine wine?

[03:39]几家流落在呀嘛在街头 在巷口

How many are left living in the streets and alleys?

[03:49]月儿弯弯照九州

The crescent moon shines upon the Nine Provinces

[03:56]几家欢乐几家愁

How many are happy? How many are troubled?

[04:03]几家高楼饮美酒

How many are in high pavilions enjoying fine wine?

[04:10]几家流落在呀嘛在街头 在巷口

How many are left living in the streets and alleys?

[04:20]月弯弯 去寻仙

A crescent moon. In search of divinity

[04:34]月弯弯 故人远

A crescent moon. Old friend has gone afar.

# Chapter 16: Yan Du Xian [Salted Pork Soup] (1)

Beneath that original post, many of the people who knew Gu Sheng were starting to madly @ her in the comments.

Fortunately, this was just an unknown fan, and the number of people who reposted the message was relatively small. At least, within this last half an hour, there had not been too many reposts or comment replies. Gu Sheng nonchalantly glanced at this poster's Weibo profile. She swore, anyone who saw this Weibo tweet would definitely do the same thing.

And then...

She discovered that this person lived in the same city as her. So that meant... she and Qiang Qing Ci lived in the same city, too?!

Gu Sheng's heart skipped several beats.

She touched the cold back of her hand to her face, still feeling that this was all unreal...

Such a strangely remarkable feeling.

In an instant, Toupai seemed very close and dear.

A man who had both a gorgeous voice and a handsome appearance could basically be considered a rare phenomenon, you know?..... If God bestowed on you a nice voice, he would also give you an ordinary face. This was the biggest, regretful conclusion she had come to after looking at many photographs of radio DJs and people in the entertainment circle. However, she was a voice lover anyway and had no real criteria for a man's face, and she also saw nothing wrong with this...

But, Toupai's voice... paired with an attractive face! That was absolutely going against the natural law of things!

Because of this Weibo tweet, Gu Sheng spent her entire lunch digesting the news that she and Toupai were in the same city.

After lunch, she laid down on the couch with her laptop on her knees,

listening to the songs people had sent to her and following along with the lyrics while she practiced the melody. Her mind was somewhat preoccupied so she was constantly muddling up the lyrics. After singing the wrong words several times in a row, she finally could not help picking up her mobile phone, and she noticed that her most recent contact in WeChat was still Toupai...

She cleared her throat, wanting to send a message.

But what should she say? To actually ask him if he really was in the same city as her? And then throw in a stirring sigh and exclaim, “DaRen, such a coincidence, ah...”?

Forget it.

She continued gazing at the screen and humming her songs.

Fine. Actually, she just continued being preoccupied and unfocused.

After repeatedly getting the lyrics wrong, she was starting to go crazy with frustration, but luckily, Geng Xiaoxing’s timely phone call came. “Dear Sheng Sheng Man Dada, are you free? I have something totally awesome for you to listen to.”

“Huh? What?”

“The storyline song that our website and Wanmei collaborated on. It’s out.” Geng Xiaoxing was extremely excited. “Not that ‘Sword Cry in the Land of the River and Lakes’ song of yours... Hey, wait. Yours was supposed to be a pre-event warm-up. How come it hasn’t been released yet? Our actual main attraction is out already.”

“It’s out? Really?”

The storyline song was not song by Gu Sheng, so naturally, she would not know what its progress was.

However, she recalled how all of this happened. It had started with Geng Xiaoxing and herself planning this. And then, Wanmei joined in... And then, they decided to do a storyline song... And then, they decided to do a pre-event warm-up by releasing “Sword Cry in the Land of the Rivers

and Lakes” first... And then they used the idea of a rehearsal as a gimmick to allow all those DaRen to have a pre-event special performance...

So, well, up to this point, she still had not done anything truly useful, and the other party’s storyline song was already ready and out.

Gu Sheng felt guilty for a little while and decided to politely ask Dou Dou Dou Bing if there were any problems with the vocal track she had recorded and sent over... That way, she could demonstrate that she was proactive and not just, uh, exchanging cooking knowledge with Toupai...

“Are you listening, Gu Sheng?!”

“Huh?” Gu Sheng answered bewilderedly.

“You didn’t hear anything I said just now?!”

“No... Tell me one more time.” Gu Sheng came up with an arbitrary excuse. “I just got a new musical composition, and I was thinking about how I should arrange it.”

“Meh, you know so many instruments anyway. Up to you.” Geng Xiaoxing grumpily repeated what she had said a moment ago and then added, “I listened to the storyline song and thought it was super awesome. Especially Jue Mei’s voice... So beautiful you could cry...”

Gu Sheng felt embarrassingly awkward for a little bit. Although Jue Mei was extremely popular, his voice just was not her type.

Therefore, her response to Geng Xiaoxing’s comment was, um, slightly, ahem... not sharing in the enthusiasm.

However, in regards to the feelings one gets as a voice lover, she completely could demonstrate rapport...

“I guess his voice suits your taste...” Gu Sheng worked with her.

“Don’t you find Jue Mei’s domineering voice super, unbeatably nice to listen to?”

“Uh ... It’s pretty good.”

“.....”

“It’s okay. I understand what you mean. Everyone’s preference in voices is different.” Gu Sheng continued in a very serious tone to work with her. “Anyway, what you feel for Jue Mei is... Like, the instant you hear his voice, your heart is stirred and flutters in response, right?”

“Uh-huh...” Geng Xiaoxing’s voice immediately dropped an octave and, like she was someone’s little wife, repeated, “Heart is stirred and flutters...”

“Uh... Let’s get back on topic.”

Gu Sheng finally realized from this demonstration what she was like when faced with her own idol’s voice:

(◕◕)..... Absolutely pathetic. Deserved to be spurned...

“Right. Back on topic, mm-hmm.” Geng Xiaoxing’s voice was tender to the extreme. “Jue Mei said you should have a listen because Toupai thinks the final result is still not great. But I think it’s fine, ah. Definitely the best among anything that I’ve listened to...”

While Geng Xiaoxing was grumbling out a few more sentences, Gu Sheng had already received the song in her QQ inbox.

However, how come she felt this was very weird?

Why did they need her to listen to it? Was it really necessary for this little unknown singer to critique one of Wanmei’s works? ...

Gu Sheng agreed to have a listen, hung up the phone, and opened up the audio file.

.....

Ridiculously beautiful, k?!

..... Toupai DaRen, what kind of standards do you have? How could you not be satisfied with this piece?..... From the singing to the spoken lines, from the music arrangement to the post-production to the lyrics – there was nothing about it that was not perfect...

It had been a long time since Gu Sheng had last listened to something of such high quality. And particularly, this also contained lines delivered

by Toupai.

She was overcome with excitement as she listened over and over again to it. She must have listened seven or eight times before she took a slight break. So..... for a work of art like this, what shortcomings could it possibly have that needed to be reworked? T T

Geng Xiaoxing, are you sure Jue Mei DaRen was not just pulling your leg?...

She truly felt she could not offer any additional comments. Besides “great,” all she could say was more “great.”

After thinking about it for a little while, she decided to give Geng Xiaoxing a call again to convey that her “skills were inadequate” to provide any useful critique and also to express her deep admiration and love of this storyline song.

Just as she picked up her mobile phone, however, she unexpectedly noticed a WeChat message had come in a few minutes ago.

..... It was Toupai.

“Did the poached ‘pearls’ and conch taste good?”

Qiang Qing Ci’s voice was low and even, and hearing it in the afternoon seemed to tint it with the warmth of sunshine.

As Gu Sheng listened to this sentence, she suddenly... felt her heart stir and flutter.

Oh Heaven.

Gu Sheng, you’re not starting to have wild fancies about DaRen, are you? ...

Her gaze was fixed blankly on her phone for a long while. Finally, she cleared her throat but still dared not reply. She was thinking – very seriously and carefully considering – whether she really had been influenced by all the gossip and rumors and was unconsciously thinking that... that Toupai was interested in her?!

Gu Sheng, wake up, you! Wake up!



Things in the 2-D world cannot be taken seriously...

She set her computer on the coffee table beside her, stood up, and took several deep breaths. Throwing aside any fanciful notions for the moment, she started to carry out a normal conversation with Toupai: “Quite tasty. DaRen, have you eaten yet?”

Qiang Qing Ci: “Eating from a take-out box.”

So sad... How could they make Toupai eat take-out? T T

“You’re not at home?” Gu Sheng pretended she did not know and had not seen anything.

“Mm.” Qiang Qing Ci chuckled. “Didn’t someone @ you?”

(◕◕)... DaRen, don’t expose my fib, please? ...

Just act as if you can’t see those types of tweets that have romantic suggestions, k?...

Gu Sheng forced herself to continue acting oblivious. “Uh. Haven’t had a chance to check Weibo yet.”

DaRen, please don’t keep on with this topic. Please, please don’t call me out on this anymore.

Fortunately, Qiang Qing Ci did not carry on with this subject.

He actually asked her about the recording for “Sword Cry in the Land of the Rivers and Lakes.” Gu Sheng answered very openly that she had sent off her own audio file with her vocal track and was just waiting for Dou Dou Dou Bing, the very important coordinator, to provide any comments or feedback..... Then, she remembered the song that she had just been listening to and decided to offer up her opinion directly to Qiang Qing Ci. “DaRen, I just listened to the storyline song that they sent to me. I thought it was done especially well.”

“Mm-hmm. It is pretty good.” Qiang Qing Ci’s voice was very calm and composed.

.....

So, it really was Jue Mei playing a joke on Geng Xiaoxing?

Gu Sheng was busy speculating.

Qiang Qing Ci sent another voice message: “But, if it could have been recorded in a recording studio, the outcome would have been even better.”

His voice was very nonchalant, like he was stating a fact.

Wait, no. It was a fact, k?

Everyone knew that it was best to do recordings in a recording studio; otherwise, these things called recording studios would not even exist...

Gu Sheng: “Yeah. It’d be even more perfect for sure.”

Qiang Qing Ci casually told her, “But, that song is basically done now.”

Gu Sheng: “Mm...”

“As for ‘Sword Cry in the Land of the Rivers and Lakes’...” His voice in the recording had a slight resonance and a gentle tone to it that was bewitching. “I will set up a time with all of you and reserve a recording studio.”

“That would be so awesome! That way, it’s definitely going to have the best...”

..... outcome.

Gu Sheng’s voice came to an abrupt halt...

Recording studio?

Recording studio?!

She gaped at her mobile phone, unable to believe what she had just heard.

Did DaRen, he... he just say...he wanted to record in a studio... with me.....?

# Chapter 17: Yan Du Xian [Salted Pork Soup] (2)

Her unfinished sentence had been sent out already. Surprisingly, Qiang Qing Ci did not reply.

Gu Sheng was truly in shock from the idea. The word, “meet-up” was floating around in her brain... She had never met-up with any of her friends in the 2-D world before. Even though, this was nothing like the once popular fad of online dating and was just a bunch of friends who all loved ancient style music getting together, recording a song, and having dinner or something...

(◕◕)... Having dinner? That was way too remote to think about...

Oh no. Just even thinking about the word, “meet-up” and then linking that idea with all those frequently heard names, especially Toupai, in the entertainment circle made her feel awful all over.

For half an hour, she wandered numbly around her room, still unable to settle down.

She decided to go into the bathroom, and there she faced the mirror, staring off into space. Her appearance... Was it really suitable to go see a bunch of superstars in the entertainment circle?

Out in the living room, an alert sound rang out from her mobile phone. She dashed out and picked it up.

It was Toupai’s voice message: “Out of our group of seven, there are four of us who are in the same city. How does tomorrow afternoon at 3 o’clock sound? From what Jue Mei said, classes resume for you the day after tomorrow?”

Tomorrow?!

Gu Sheng felt like she was going to have a nervous breakdown.

What was that looming sense that she was feeling, like doomsday was coming? ...

To go see her absolute favourite voice plus a bunch of respected elders who were all her favourites as well and... and ... she was not given any time at all to prepare. At the very least, she needed to prepare herself both psychologically and outwardly, you know, DaRen? ...

She struggled within herself for a long time, but in the end, said into her WeChat, "Alright... That time should be no problem for me."

She could not act all pompous and snooty, right? They were already all accommodating the start of her school term.

After she sent her message, she suddenly was struck with confusion. How does Toupai know he and I are in the same city?

Weibo?

Weibo... Mm-hmm. Her Weibo profile did state her home city, whereas Toupai's was kept private.

Alright. T T It was not unusual at all for DaRen to know.

She and Toupai conversed a little longer regarding the time and address as well as how they were going to work things out with the other three singers who were not in the city. Toupai also in passing reminded her to go to bed early tonight. After that, he did not send any more voice messages. Gu Sheng gazed at her phone, quietly stroking Toupai's profile picture on the screen as she murmured to it, "Toupai DaRen... How in the world am I going to get through the next twenty-something hours? ..."

Gu Sheng was struggling over everything, from clothing to hairstyle, from whether to wear pants or a dress, to debating whether to wear her hair up or down. In the end, she decided to just keep it simple and clean and wear a pair of trousers and her down jacket. With the cold weather, it was best to dress a little more practically; otherwise, it really would be like meeting up with online friends or going on a blind date, and that would truly be awkward. According to what Toupai had told her, of the people collaborating with her on the song, she would be meeting Dou Dou Dou Bing, Fei Shao, and Wwwwk tomorrow. And then there were the two others, Jue Mei and Feng Ya Song, who were coming strictly because they were bored and had nothing to do....

Amongst this group, only Wwwwk and Fei Shao had ever had photos of themselves released on the Internet. This was because, of these two, the former was a radio host while the latter... hmm... he was a voice actor who did not care whether his face was on the Internet. The other people had never been “seen” before, especially Toupai, who did not ever reveal any personal information, much less have his photograph show up on the Internet.

It would have been a lie if she said she was not excited, but she did not dare tell anyone about it.

People outside of the entertainment circle would not understand, and anyone in the circle would definitely hire an assassin to kill her or try to coerce her, by threat or by bribe, into secretly taking some photographs. As a result, Gu Sheng had no choice but to keep it all to herself from that afternoon until the middle of the night when she was still unable to fall asleep. When she arose the next day, her complexion was paler than usual, and it was apparent she had not slept well. She picked up a brush and began to run it through her hair. While she she was brushing, she suddenly remembered that she had to head back to school today!

In other words, that meant she needed to carry a week’s worth of clothing and food to the recording studio... and then after that, go back to school...

Totally destroying to her image...

However, there was no other option. By the time they were done recording, it would be evening already, and the address of the recording studio was not very far from her university. In fact, it was actually on the way. Recognizing that she did not have much of a choice, she faced reality and started to gather up her clothing and food. One at a time, she stuffed them into her backpack until it was bulging. As she threw it on her back and started heading out the door, her mother did not forget to call after her, “After your gathering with your classmates is done, head straight back to school. When you’re back in your dorm, give me a call.”

Gu Sheng guiltily answered with a quick “mm-hmm.”

She did not dare tell her mother she was going to meet-up a group of 2-D world friends whom she had never met before.

She did not want to spend several hours trying to explain to her mother the difference between online and 2-D world friends... mainly because there really was no actual difference.

After riding the metro, she transferred to a bus and rode for another two stops. When she arrived at the recording studio, it was nearly 2:30 p.m.

(◕v◕) Half an hour early.

Should she go up? Or wander around downstairs until three o'clock?... Gusts of cold air slipped in through edges of her scarf. So cold. Why was it so cold today? It wasn't going to snow, was it?

She strolled around and whittled away another twenty minutes before she finally went inside and took an elevator to the fourth floor.

With a "ding," the elevator opened.

Her view opened up into a sitting area. Two young women were at what appeared to be a bar-height reception desk. One was pouring a glass of water while the other was on the telephone and taking down notes. The girl who was pouring water noticed Gu Sheng and addressed her with a smile, "Three o'clock studio? You're Mo Qingcheng[1]'s friend?"

Gu Sheng was taken aback for a moment, but, remembering the pinyin name he gave her in WeChat, she inferred that that must be Toupai's name. She nodded.

"Head inside to the back. It's the room on the left. Several people have arrived already." The girl pointed at the sterilized cooler next to the reception area sofa. "If you're thirsty, there's water there that you can help yourself to. The coffee station has instant coffee." After this methodical and thorough introduction, the girl smiled and went back to drinking her glass of water.

A very professional and speedy string of explanations.

This was Gu Sheng's first time in a recording studio, and she at first had

been worried that it would be a posh and serious sort of place. She had not expected it to be so casual and normal. Following the girl's instructions, she walked to the very end of the corridor. On the way, she passed three or four rooms. Some of the doors were open, and she could see the recording engineer staring at a video and syncing audio tracks. Others were closed. Probably in the middle of recording?

She came to a stop at the end of the corridor in front of the room on the left hand side.

She was nervous.

She gave a slight exhale and cleared her throat.

What should she say first? How about just, "Hello everyone. I'm Sheng Sheng Man"? ... Seemed a little idiotic ...

Her hand was on the doorknob. Right as she was about to open the door, it was pulled open from the inside, and a very tall man suddenly stood before her. Both of them were taken aback.

"Hello," Gu Sheng blurted.

And then... the young man actually laughed out loud. "Sheng Sheng Man?"

"Mm-hmm." Gu Sheng nodded.

"I'm Jue Mei Sha Yi." The corners of the man's lips were curved up in a smile. Because of his height, his presence was slightly stifling. "Ah, such a pleasure to meet you, Sheng Sheng."

Initially, the first part of what he had said was very proper, but the latter sentence was enough to thoroughly embarrass her.

Gu Sheng suddenly felt very awkward and hot with embarrassment. Someone was mimicking the way Toupai called her "Sheng Sheng"...

While she was still standing there staring blankly at him, Jue Mei had already turned to the side and told the people inside, "Toupai's golden master has arrived."

.....

Gu Sheng felt that if he said one more sentence, she was definitely going to turn around and run away...

As her line of sight opened up, a very light-complexioned, bespectacled young man who had been sitting inside with legs crossed on a couch, immediately leaped up and rushed over when he heard these words.

“Golden Master, Golden Master, hello. I’m Feng Ya Song.”

.....

“Alright, alright. You scared her...” Jue Mei Sha Yi used his body to obstruct him.

“Did I? Sheng Sheng? Did I scare you?” Feng Ya Song beamed at her.

Gu Sheng shook her head, forcing herself to remain calm. “Of course not... No, you didn’t...”

A hand suddenly came up from behind her and rested itself on her shoulder.

Gu Sheng was frozen in shock when she heard someone say, “Don’t pick on the little girl. Hi Golden Master, I’m Wwwwk. You know, when you and Toupai DaRen were sending lovey dovey messages to each other, the one who was eating hot pot right next to him.”

.....

She swore, she honestly was about to cry.

These people...

“You people, out of the way, out of the way.” At last, a young woman, who appeared to be only a few years older than Gu Sheng, came up to them. She was dressed in a white sweater and seemed very sweet and gentle. She wrapped an arm around Gu Sheng and rescued her from the circle the three men had formed around her, all the while, not forgetting to scold them. “Toupai last minute could not make it. Fine. Now you guys are bullying Sheng Sheng... Hmph!” She pulled Sheng Sheng over to sit down on the couch with her. “I’m Dou Bing.”

“Toupai’s not coming?” Gu Sheng was a little dubious, but from a quick



glance around the room, there really were only these four people here...

“Something came up last minute... Nothing he could do about it. He’s busier than all of us.” Dou Dou Dou Bing was feeling resigned as well. “He repeatedly told me to make sure I take good care of you so you wouldn’t be scared by these guys.”

.....

Alright.

Gu Sheng felt that it was a shame and was also a little disappointed.

After all, Toupai was the most mysterious persona. Seeing him was many people’s wish, right?

Fortunately, these were all people Gu Sheng had gotten to know over the last several months now, so even though they looked like they were all five to six years older than her, she was very soon able to chat comfortably with them. After a little while, a bleary-eyed Fei Shao arrived. Gu Sheng learned that this recording studio was actually owned by Fei Shao and his partners, and this particular room had been reserved for them from three o’clock onwards.

As a result, none of them were in a hurry. A bunch of snacks were opened and tossed onto the table outside of the recording area, making it seem like a little party.

While listening to their idle conversation, Gu Sheng let her gaze wander around this particular studio.

The outer room contained all the equipment as well as a couch for resting and a coffee table.

An entire wall of glass allowed her to see that the soundproof room on the other side was empty of any persons and contained some microphones that were currently unused and a table and chairs.

Very clean and very professional.

Jue Mei was chattering away when he suddenly remembered that Gu Sheng was still a student. Worried that she would be returning to campus

at too late an hour, he quickly told everyone to get to work. In reality, he and Feng Ya Song had come only to join in on the fun. Without Qiang Qing Ci, there were really only four of them who needed to do anything. Each of them only had a few lines, so half an hour or so per person was about all that was needed.

When Gu Sheng finished recording her part, it was not even six o'clock yet.

Here, inside the soundproof room, she could hear all the sounds from the outside area. Recording inside a studio was indeed the most ideal. Not only did it produce the best product, there were also professional recording engineers and experienced people to provide coaching and guidance.

It was a pity... that Toupai was not here.

Sitting in the soundproof recording room, she heard the recording engineer tell her, "Ok, you're good," and she immediately breathed out in relief. As she was about to take off her headset, she heard Feng Ya Song suddenly pipe out, "Mo Qingcheng, you're a forever yogurt lover, eh."

Her heart gave a leap, and she automatically turned her head to the side and looked over towards the glass wall.

On the other side of the wall...

A young man dressed in jeans and a black, long-sleeved t-shirt was standing there. He appeared to have arrived not long ago. Right as she turned to look out the glass wall, he happened to also be looking at her. One hand held a large carton of yogurt while the other hand waved in greeting to her.

Those eyes. Dark and bright. So astonishingly beautiful.

Outer corners turned up. And a smile seen in them.

She stared disbelievingly at him.

It was him.

"Hi Sheng Sheng." His voice was so real as it came through her headset.

In a mesmerizingly low and warm voice, he told her, “I’m Qiang Qing Ci.”

\*

[1] 莫青成. These are the character’s for Toupai’s actual name, as opposed to 莫倾城, which is what Sheng Sheng had guessed his name was when he gave her his WeChat ID.

\*

Additional Comments:

Coincidence that all these “elders” in the 2-D world all happened to be available on this particular day to do a recording, even with less than 24 hours notice? I think not! Ah, Toupai, is good! Wonder how long he had planned this with his pals...

## Chapter 18: Yan Du Xian [Salted Pork Soup] (3)

With one hand covering an ear of her headset, Gu Sheng listened to the sound of laughter coming from outside the soundproof room and in through her headphones.

“Hi,” she replied. She was trying her best to stay calm and more calm, and as a result, her voice sounded rather feeble.

She never would have thought that he was Qiang Qing Ci, that Qiang Qing Ci was him... A few months ago, the very first time she saw Qiang Qing Ci, she had been playing with her dog and had secretly criticized this man for his fondness of drinking yogurt with fruit chunks... And the time in the store, across the street from him, watching through the glass as he protected his female companion...

Qiang Qing Ci smiled at her again before turning to the recording engineer and requesting, “Could I trouble you to let me listen to what was just recorded?”

“Everyone’s?”

“Yes, everyone’s.”

He was very tall, so when he bent over to listen to the recording engineer playback the results of everybody’s hard work, his hands were propped on the edge of the desk. Gu Sheng pulled off her headphones, pushed open the door, and walked out the room. When she saw him there, his back facing her, she still felt this was all unimaginable.

A hand snaked up onto her shoulder, and then Dou Dou Dou Bing was next to her ear as she asked with a laugh, “What do you think? He’s got some good looks, doesn’t he? He isn’t called ‘Toupai’ for no reason.”

(◡◡)...

“Mm-hmm... Very handsome.” She lowered her voice when she said this.

She had not expected that just as she spoke the word, “handsome,” Qiang Qing Ci would happen to turn around and look at her...

Her heart skipped a half a beat again.

Was she afraid that he would recognize her?... Or was she hoping that he would recognize her?

She did not know. All she knew was that she was especially nervous right now, so nervous that she did not dare speak.

Qiang Qing Ci’s eyes fixed on her for a couple of seconds before he suddenly broke into a smile. Pulling a straw out from its plastic wrap, he stabbed it into the yogurt drink and took a sip. “Are you thinking we’ve seen each other before?”

A shocking sentence.

Gu Sheng was so anxious she did not answer right away.

Everyone in the room started to get excited, as if they had discovered a big secret...

“

“Whoa!” Wwwwk exclaimed and then immediately ripped open a bag of potato chips. “You should have said something earlier. Before Sheng Sheng got here, we were discussing where we should take her to eat and then how we would, in passing, indoctrinate her with your one-of-a-kind, incomparable, amazing guy image.”

“Someone took ‘a winding path to find his secluded little haven.’ Oh yeah, winding path to a secluded haven[1] [an indirect path to get to the ultimate result]. And we’ve been kept in the dark all along.”

“Was it in a photo? Or a video?” Feng Ya Song grinned at Toupai. “Did you secretly upload a video online? High def, no pixels, fully uncensored?”

“Feng Ya Song!” Dou Dou Dou Bing scowled at him. “Don’t talk mature subject matters!”

Everyone was getting more and more inappropriate with what they were saying.

Gu Sheng could not carry on being shy any longer. She nodded and said, "I've seen you before, but I'm not sure if you still remember..."

"I remember." Qiang Qing Ci seemed to be recalling the memory. "That day, you were holding a dog."

After he said this, he let out a little laugh.

.....

A live version of his laughter, coupled with the real live person right there...

Gu Sheng felt a great need to continuously divert her own attention: look at the person, then don't listen to his voice; listen to his voice, then don't look at the actual person..... The two stimuli working together were honestly too much for anyone to handle, k? T T

The conversation between the two of them was simply too vague and left people feeling very curious.

But in this type of circumstance, the more they tried to explain, the more troubles they would bring upon themselves. Plus, Gu Sheng could not simply tell everyone to be quiet so she could explain in detail how Qiang Qing Ci had walked into her family's grocery store and bought a bottle of water and yogurt, but the two of them had actually not communicated verbally at all so it was impossible for them to have recognized each other... and thus, they only ended up brushing past one another... Right?

A single, brief encounter and yet she remembered him. That was enough for people to think it was unbelievably strange and start speculating wildly...

Gu Sheng struggled with what to do. Further explanations would not work, but not saying anything would not do either.

"Alright, that's enough joking around." Toupai cleared his throat and stated flatly, "How we met is our business. It's not necessary for you guys to join in on the fun."

.....

.....

.....

.....

Gu Sheng had an urge to make a run for it. DaRen, your way of putting a stop to things is completely ineffective, you know? It will totally make people think completely in the wrong direction, k? ... Everyone laughed, some loudly, some quietly, and the expressions on their faces were all different. But everyone's faces had the same thing written all over them: "There's a love affair here."

Fortunately, Toupai was someone who meant what he said.

After stating this, he did not raise the subject again. Not long after, he grabbed a sheet of paper, entered the soundproof room, and started over and over again to try various ways of voicing his monologue. The spoken lines in "Sword Cry in the Land of the Rivers and Lakes" could not be described simply by just the word "dominating." It gave off an aura of someone looking out over the world with an incomparably commanding and outstanding bearing...

As Gu Sheng listened to Toupai delivering his lines, her mind was already filling in countless images for her. She even had the urge to ask Cousin whether the basics for getting started on playing "Sword 3 Online" were difficult to learn... Her eyes were fixated on Toupai wearing his headset inside the soundproof room, and her entire being felt as if it was not even in a real universe. To be able to listen to Toupai record live was such a huuuuge blessing...

He had voice acted for so many dramas and commercials that he did not need any initial guidance from the recording engineer, relying completely on his own feeling for the script to record six different versions of his lines. The recording engineer listened briefly to them and recommended two, saying they were both very good. Even the professional could not choose just one.

He walked out of the soundproof room, still holding his yogurt, drinking and listening repeatedly to those two versions.

When he was finished the drink, he tossed the yogurt carton into the wastebasket. "I like the first one." He turned around and looked at Gu Sheng. "Sheng Sheng, which one do you like?"

His eyes were dark and bright. Because she was not directly facing him, the angle she was at made the upward slant of the outer corner of his eyes even more obvious.

So... beautiful.

Looking at those eyes, she felt somewhat flustered.

.....

"I... like them both," Gu Sheng replied honestly. "They both have their strong points."

What you feel towards something depends entirely on your own personal preferences, you know?..... How was she supposed to pick? T T

Jue Mei happened to be off to the side making a phone call right then, but when he heard Gu Sheng's reply, he could not help covering up his phone with his hand and summarizing for them, "In general, when girls listen to your voice, if you record 100 options, they'll think all 100 are good. Qiang Qing Ci, haven't you realized how deadly you are?"

Jue Mei may have seemed as if he was joking, but his statement was absolutely correct.

For the girls who liked Toupai, even if he took the same sentence and spoke it 100 different ways, each one would be worth treasuring. Then, when there was nothing to do, they would pull them all out to listen. They absolutely, absolutely would not dislike any single version...

"Hmm... Let me think about it..." He cleansed his hands with a moist towelette, then picked up the bag of potato chips from the table and started eating, one chip at a time.

The way he ate potato chips was very unique.



Most people would pick up a chip between their thumb and index finger, but he instead used his middle and ring fingers. Furthermore, it did not appear like there was anything wrong with what he was doing, and he was very deft in his movements. After a while, he seemed to have eaten until he was satisfied, and he gave an indistinct chuckle. “Forget it. Let’s think about what we’re going to have for dinner first. We’ll make a choice when it’s time for post-production.”

“Wait, no,” Wwwwk suddenly let out a laugh. “I have a suggestion. Before we go, how about we make a private little souvenir?”

“Private souvenir?” Feng Ya Song chimed in.

“Sheng Sheng loves Toupai’s voice the most. This, we can all tell. Toupai also said that he loves Sheng Sheng’s voice the most ... Since Fei Shao has offered us the use of his recording studio for free, this is a rare opportunity. It’ll be a waste if we don’t record a few more things as souvenirs. In my opinion, since the two of you so ... love ... each other...” Wwwwk deliberately paused for half a beat and rubbed his chin before continuing, “... ‘s voices, why don’t you record a duet right here, live on the spot?”

Fei Shao’s eyes lit up as he ripped off his baseball cap excitedly. “Dang! Awesome suggestion!”

.....

A... live duet with Toupai?

Gu Sheng’s blood pressure, which had just fallen back down not long ago, immediately soared. She stole a glance at the studio, imagining herself and Toupai in that soundproof room... face to face singing... and...

This isn’t a KTV, k? There’s honestly so much ambience in there, k? Two people in that glass room, a bunch of onlookers on the outside..... T T

Even when she was at a KTV before, she had never sung a duet with a boy in front of a whole bunch of people. T T

“Mm. Sure,” Toupai agreed, not showing any awkwardness. “We can

upload it onto 5sing[2] after we are done recording. Consider it a Valentine's Day gift to the fans.”

Valentine's Day... gift...

Alright... Many DaRen in the online world liked to do something on special occasions like Valentine's Day, Children's Day, etc. Normal, totally normal.

Gu Sheng was still digesting this suggestion, but he, after thinking briefly, was already saying, “Shang Ye [Oh Heaven]... okay with you?”

Those two words, shang ye, coming from his lips, seemed to carry a heartrending sense of bleakness.

The heckling crowd surrounding them went completely quiet.

The mountains will crumble, heaven and earth will come together, and only then will I cease to love you[3].

Wha- ...?

Really. So. Attention-Grabbing.

\*

[1] Orig. 曲径通幽 ‘qu jing tong you.’ Imagine a winding little pathway suddenly opening up to a peaceful, enchanting, and secluded view. One of Toupai's friends is insinuating that Toupai knew Sheng Sheng for a long time, but took a long and winding route before finally “getting to her.”

[2] 5sing.kugou.com Chinese website used to share music. Similar to soundclick.com. Users can upload, share, and download original songs, covers, background music, etc.

[3] Taken from the ancient poem, 上邪 “Shang Ye” or “Oh Heaven”

# Chapter 19: Yan Du Xian [Salted Pork Soup] (4)

Gu Sheng had completely frozen.

Qiang Qing Qi was an action-oriented person. After saying this, he was already asking the recording engineer to search for the background music and motioning to her that she could go into the soundproof live room. Soon, Fei Shao, with an evil smirk on his face, had very considerately printed off the lyrics and brought them over to the two of them.

Gu Sheng went to stand next to Qiang Qing Ci, put on a pair of headphones, and glanced at the faces of everyone standing on the other side of the glass wall. She honestly felt like she was going to have a heart attack..... DaRen, are you completely changing over your style, and right before you retire from the entertainment circle, you're letting loose and starting to seek out rumors and gossip? T T

Meeting for the first time and already recording a duet in the studio. Was this really okay? ...

With one hand covering her headset, Gu Sheng heard Qiang Qing Ci ask her, "Need to practice a few times?"

"I..." Gu Sheng forced herself to forget that there were actually seven or eight other people quietly listening in on what the two of them were saying. "I might need to practice along with the background music one time. DaRen... how would you like to work out the parts?"

Qiang Qing Ci's eyes sparkled with laughter. Glancing at her, he put on his headphones and answered, "The opening of this song is really high. I'll sing the chorus. The rest..." He picked up a pen and marked off a few lines. "We'll sing these lines together. The remainder you sing by yourself, okay?"

.....

.....

Was this really okay? ...

Girls were supposed to be able to sing higher than men... T T

If Toupai's fans heard this, they would on one hand be saying, all starry-eyed, "DaRen is amazing!" while on the other hand be saying that Sheng Sheng Man was completely useless... But Gu Sheng felt that, even if she did try to sing that high, her voice would definitely crack. In view of the fact that Toupai had so effortlessly sung "Drunken Dream in Divine Rain", he was probably more suited for this song's chorus.

But...

That other little spirit in her that was Toupai's diehard fan was reprimanding this little spirit who was trying her best to keep level-headed: Even if I never heard him sing "Drunken Dream in Divine Rain", I still have complete faith that my dada can sing anything with no problems at all!!!!

Fine.

The level-headed spirit surrendered.

In reality, from the moment she stood in this soundproof room next to Toupai, level-headedness had completely left her.

Gu Sheng was very familiar with this song. In a low voice, she read through the lyrics once in order to avoid the embarrassing incident where, halfway through singing, she did not recognize a particular word. Then, feeling that she was about ready, she said, "DaRen, I'm good."

Qiang Qing Ci answered her with a "mm" and then said, "You can call me Qiang Qing Ci, or you can call me Mo Qingcheng. You don't have to keep calling me 'DaRen.'"

.....

In her headset, she could again hear clamoring coming from the group of people on the outside of the room.

"Sheng Sheng, say it, say it. The best would be to call him Qing Ci or Qingcheng..."

“That’s enough, Feng Ya Song ...” Dou Dou Dou Bing frowned at him before offering her advice through the glass wall. “Sheng Sheng, calling him Qiang Qing Ci will make it seem like you two aren’t very close. Mo Qingcheng would be better, yes? Huh?”

“I agree.” Wwwwk’s opinion was concise and to the point.

“I agree, too.” Fei Shao immediately chose his group to join.

Even Jue Mei finally stood up from the sofa and walked over to stand behind Fei Shao. Placing a hand on Fei Shao’s shoulder, he said seriously, “Sheng Sheng, if you want to progress the relationship further so that it becomes a 3-D world friendship, you will need to call him Mo Qingcheng.”

.....

All you, DaRens...

Did we really need to be this serious about this kind of thing? T T

Whatever you wish to call me will be okay.” Even Toupai could not tolerate the people outside anymore. Unable to hold back his laughter, he said, “I just didn’t want you to feel too uptight.”

“Alright...” She nearly slipped and said “DaRen” again but immediately managed to stop herself. “Uh, Mo... Qingcheng.”

( ◡ ◡ ◡ )..... Why did she suddenly feel like this was a matchmaking blind date?

And it was a blind date surrounded by nosy aunties watching as she and her date introduced themselves to one another ...

Gu Sheng could swear she must have been blushing right then. She raised one hand unconsciously to the side of her headphones, acting as if she needed to study the lyrics, to partially block her face from view. Seeing that both of them were ready, the recording engineer quickly started the background music. The two of them followed Toupai’s plan and, without much trouble, familiarized themselves with the song to the musical accompaniment.

Seriously, Toupai was someone who could really sing.

Gu Sheng had to sing her part while still giving part of her attention to listen to Toupai sing.

Listening to someone sing at such a close distance like this, especially when this someone was the perfect Toupai, was definitely a scene she had never imagined before. After they had basically practiced through the entire song, Toupai very diligently told her that they would have to sing through another time and even did not forget to thoughtfully advise her, “Don’t put too much effort into your voice right now. After we’ve found the feeling in the song this time through, then we will start to do the actual singing. Save your breath and energy for later.”

Gu Sheng nodded.

But when she discovered that the second time around, Toupai did not even need to look at the lyrics... she realized that this second practice was really only for her benefit...

This time, besides singing himself, Toupai was mainly paying attention to her. After he had finished singing his own part, he immediately looked over at her.

Gu Sheng originally could have come in at her part just fine, but with his one glance, she actually stumbled in early.

“Sheng Sheng, don’t be nervous, don’t be nervous,” Dou Dou Dou Bing could not help laughing gleefully. “Even though I totally understand that completely normal feeling you’re having, where you can’t stay calm after Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen has taken one look at you... But, it gets better after you get used to it.”

Mo Qingcheng’s eyes glanced over to the other side of the glass wall. Silence fell immediately.

Gu Sheng forced herself not to get distracted and was finally able to get through this round.

“It’s for real now, little girl.” Even the recording engineer was finding this situation very amusing. “It’s okay. Once you have officially sang

through once, there will be a lot of lines where you will each have to go back to re-record separately.”

“Alright.” Gu Sheng’s face was burning.

Everyone here was clearly amusing themselves by making fun of her, you know? T T

First time meeting all of them too, you know...

“Don’t be nervous.” Toupai’s voice was low and soft and had the power to calm a person’s heart.

Very quickly, the musical introduction of the song could be heard.

[[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyzfURPdLOY>]]

With one hand on the microphone’s frame, Mo Qingcheng finally started singing the first line along with the background music:

“Your wedding gown like fire has scorched the horizon

Henceforth, the setting sun will sear my heart [‘til red] like vermilion...”

When he opened his mouth to sing the first note, Gu Sheng swore she clearly heard her own heartbeat.

Seriously, it sounded so good it could make someone cry.

Effortless high notes that carried an intense sense of anguish and unwillingness to let go.

He even gave the listeners the feeling that he was the general in the story – someone who did not want to give in, did not want to let go of the woman he loved, but caught between the country and the princess, he had no choice but to only stand and watch as the princess left, to allow her to enter into a political marriage...

Gu Sheng was a person who loved music, and at the same time, she loved any stories set in the ancient times.

The cruelest thing in the world, perhaps, was after having possessed something, to lose it again. If one had never experienced those beautiful feelings before, they would not be etched into the bones and engraved on

the heart. And then to use a knife and slice away, one inch at a time, those veins and bones that were joined together because of love. That was really too cruel.

As she sang this song, she could not help looking straight up at Mo Qingcheng.

Mo Qingcheng's deep black eyes also carried her reflection in them.

As the two of them neared the end of the song, that gentle yet sorrowful section, she deliberately sang slightly offbeat to Mo Qingcheng. His male voice sang first followed by her clear and somewhat mournful repetition of his lyrics.

"Drifting petals are falling again in this season,

Yet your wedding gown is more brilliant than those falling flowers

Your lips move, as if once again to sing 'Shang Ye' [Oh Heaven]

But what you say is 'I am willing to part from my love for him.'"

What a sorrowful sentence: I am willing to part from my love for him.

As Gu Sheng sang the last note, she found she was having difficulty removing herself from the story.

But then, to her surprise, she heard Toupai unexpectedly start to speak some lines, lines that had not even appeared once when they were rehearsing. "I desire to know you deeply and love you. Forever may this be unchanging...[1]"

He even... changed the word in the poem from "jun[2]" to "er[3]."

In Mo Qingcheng's voice, she had a sense of rapport, as if he, too, was captured within this story.

Blossoms swirling in the sky of Chang'an. The smell of blood, strong as wine, carrying on the wind.

He looked straight into her eyes and told her, "'Til the different directions of the world no longer exist, 'til the seas dry, only then will I cease to love you."



\*

[1] The first two lines of the ancient poem, Shang Ye.

[2] In formal literature or ancient texts, this means “you” and is used when addressing a man.

[3] In formal literature or ancient texts, this means “you” and is used when addressing a woman.

\*

### Additional Comments:

Since many of you may have read this chapter already, I thought I'd include a little bonus here. Check out the adorable cartoon done by an artist who is also a fan of the novel. This is Toupai and Sheng Sheng's first meeting, when she was on the morning bus chatting in YY with Geng Xiaoxing and his voice suddenly appeared out of nowhere.



## Chapter 20: Yan Du Xian [Salted Pork Soup] (5)

The background music suddenly came to an end, highlighting this last spoken line.

As in the lyrics, peach blossoms that could steal one's heart seemed to be found in Mo Qingcheng's eyes, and once you looked directly into them, it was simply impossible to resist him.

Gu Sheng's face immediately flushed a deep red...

She watched as he turned around and addressed the recording engineer. "It's good."

As if she had been granted a pardon, Dou Dou Dou Bing's voice was immediately heard in the headset as she burst out, "Ridiculously amazing! Mo Qingcheng, that monologue of yours was ridiculously amazing!" And since she had opened up the dialogue, everyone started speaking at once. It was a chaotic discussion filled with sighs of praise. They all felt that once this cover was released, the number of clicks and downloads of it would instantly break records...

All those voices talking together were lively and jumbled.

Gu Sheng could not seem to hear things clearly. She honestly felt like she could not hold herself together any longer. Her favorite voice ,plus the real live Toupai right there in front of her, plus the song and monologue a moment ago. Instant lethality.

"What do you think?" Mo Qingcheng asked her as he pulled off his headset with one hand.

"..... Very perfect." Her voice seemed extremely scratchy to her. "What I mean is, the parts you sang and your monologue were absolutely perfect....."

He laughed. "Thank you."

The red in her cheeks deepened another few shades. She swore, the

most perfect memory in her life was singing this duet with Toupai. Seeing him sing live, listening to him deliver an impromptu monologue. Especially since... the words in the monologue were so entrancing...

“Sheng Sheng, are you feeling a tug at your heartstrings?” Feng Ya Song’s voice suddenly jumped into her headset.

“Your heart is about to leap out of your chest, isn’t it?” Fei Shao grinned, his arm wrapped around Feng Ya Song’s narrow shoulders. “I’m a guy and my heartstrings felt plucked at, let alone you being a girl ...”

Gu Sheng was about to burst into tears from embarrassment, and she hastily took off her headset.

Fortunately, Toupai had already removed his headset, so he had not heard anything. He helped Gu Sheng hang up her headset, then opened the door and gestured for her to step out first. She had just walked out of the soundproof room when an odd feeling overcame her. Everyone was watching both of them with a knowing look, suggestive of an unclear type of “relationship” between the two of them. Gu Sheng’s gaze flitted around, and she felt especially helpless...

She had never before in front of so many people been the target of a joke where she was paired with someone else.

In the past, at school, she was always part of the sidelines and would join in with the heckling... Even in YY events, when she was occasionally a guest host or something, she would definitely be the one doing the teasing! Could this be... karma? She was getting her just deserts? T T

Yet Mo Qingcheng’s expression was completely unperturbed as he allowed everyone to poke fun as they wished, not even bothering to pay any attention to them... And not bothering to put a stop to them either... He walked out of the recording room, and after a short discussion with the recording engineer regarding their work from a moment ago, he told Gu Sheng, “Have a drink first. Later, there will be a few lines that you’ll need to sing alone and re-record.”

“Okay...” Having been offered this great excuse, she swiftly fled the room and headed out into the large reception area to the water dispenser,

where she grabbed a disposable paper cup and poured herself some water.

Behind her, the two girls would now and then exchange a few bits of chatter and giggles. She gulped mouthful after mouthful of water to help herself calm down. Her mind, however, kept continuously replaying the melody of the song from earlier as well as the sight of Toupai wearing his headset and singing...

The girl who had given her directions to the room noticed she was there and immediately halted her conversation. She walked over and put on a show of bending down to get some water from the cooler. When her cup was full, the girl straightened up again, and, with eyes sparkling, she lowered her voice and asked in a deliberately furtive tone, "Are you... Sheng Sheng Man?"

Gu Sheng nearly sprayed the mouthful of water she had been drinking.

"Don't worry, don't worry. I'll keep it secret. It's my work ethic." The girl carried on in her clandestine voice, "I saw you and Toupai singing just now."

The stress she had just managed to suppress shot up again.

This girl couldn't be... couldn't be... couldn't be... couldn't be the same girl who had made that Weibo tweet, could she?

"I promised Toupai I would never give away his face or any of his news and information." The girl immediately confirmed Gu Sheng's suspicion. Still acting like a thief, she whispered into Gu Sheng's ear, "Don't worry. I definitely won't leak pictures or information about your face either... But I am honestly so, so jealous... Sheng Sheng, how did you and Toupai meet, huh?..."

Gu Sheng forced an awkward laugh. "Uh, just... under very ordinary circumstances."

She could not go and say that one random morning, Toupai had somehow popped into her YY channel and started teaching her how to cook, right? If she said that, the girl would either think Toupai was crazy

or else she was crazy...

“Oh, you’re too embarrassed to tell me. I get it,” the girl said with a knowing, secretive smile.

She felt so embarrassed she could just die.... What was this?

It must have been her luck today... To have her 2-D world identity exposed like this. She wanted to die...

“Sheng Sheng.”

Right when she was trying unsuccessfully to remove herself from this gossipy, nosy atmosphere, Toupai’s divinely gorgeous voice unexpectedly descended from the heavens ... He was suddenly there beside the magazine rack in the main waiting area and beckoning to her. “Come on. It’s your turn to re-record.”

Gu Sheng hurriedly answered, “Alright,” threw her paper cup into the wastebasket, and obediently walked over toward him.

She could not be concerned about what that girl would think right now. First things first was to escape out of there...

Toupai was most definitely someone who demanded perfection. When she stepped into that soundproof room again, basically the person communicating with and coaching her was Mo Qingcheng. In this regard, he was definitely the experienced senior, and Gu Sheng very, very cooperatively re-recorded many times until she was finally able to pass this strict teacher’s requirements. By the time the song was at last complete, all the people who had been hanging around watching the fun were hungry and had devoured all of the snacks on the table already.

“Gah, you two are absolute perfectionists,” Fei Shao grumbled. “All I can see in front me is rice, ah. Just rice...”

“This is a connection of the souls, you understand, Fei Shao?” Feng Ya Song sipped at the coffee he had made for himself and gleefully explained, “As two people who both possess such nice voices, all beautiful feelings begin through the interaction of their voices...”

“Haven’t they ‘connected’ for two months already... before they decided to meet-up?” Wwwwk apparently thought he was well-informed.

.....

.....

.....

.....

Gu Sheng felt that she absolutely, most certainly could not stay here with these people any longer. She had thought that she was capable of handling the things of the 2-D world, but now, she was not even able to utter a single word and had basically been teased to pieces.

“I... have something going on at school this evening.” She determinedly decided she was going to flee. “I can’t join you guys for dinner.”

“Come on, Sheng Sheng. We’re counting on you for us to have some fun tonight...” Fei Shao blurted out.

“Yeah. We’d never dare make fun of Toupai normally,” Feng Ya Song added, joining in on the protesting. “Plus, we can never find anything to make fun of him about anyways. What a rare opportunity now that you came.”

“Make fun of him? Yeah right. We’d be too scared of him telling us how to properly slice open a chest.”

.....

.....

“I’m so sorry. I really do have something to do.” Gu Sheng interrupted them, tears almost forming in her eyes. “Next time. Next time, okay?” While she was still talking, she was already pulling on her down jacket and tying on her scarf.

She was about to reach for her clothing and snack-filled backpack, but a hand had already beaten her to it and lifted it up.

Mo Qingcheng had also just put on his black down jacket. “It’s on my

way. I'll accompany you back to your school."

.....

.....

DaRen... Wha-... What are you doing carrying my bag for me?

I'm going to kill myself for making Toupai carry such a heavy backpack, k? T T

Unfortunately, after Mo Qingcheng said this, he very simply threw out the statement, "I'm leaving first; don't wait for me for dinner," and then, holding her massive, light blue backpack with one hand, he opened the door and headed out. Gu Sheng did not even have time to weigh out the pros and cons of the situation and could only run after Toupai and her backpack. Right as the door was closing behind her, she clearly heard someone let out a wolf-like howl. Apparently, the blood in them that fed off gossip was boiling to the point they could no longer control it.

The door closed.

Toupai was walking especially quickly, and Gu Sheng had to work hard to catch up to his footsteps

As she was about to tell him, "DaRen, you can give me my schoolbag back," she noticed that girl from reception gawking at her with a look that made her hair stand on end. So, she could only pretend to be oblivious and, with head lowered, follow Toupai out the main doors. Even when they were standing in front of the elevator, her eyes were still glued to her bag that was in Toupai's hand...

A light happened to be burned out in that elevator lobby at the end of the corridor, so the space was rather dim.

Mo Qingcheng raised his arm and glanced at his watch. "It's still not too late. Is your school far from here?"

"Not too far," Gu Sheng answered truthfully. "If all goes well with the bus schedule, it'll take about 20 minutes to get there."

"That's not bad." His voice was light and pleasant.

Gu Sheng still could not believe that she was here like this with him, like they were familiar friends.

They were standing there, just the two of them, casually having a conversation.

She glanced him over from bottom to top, continuing her struggle over coming up with a way to get her schoolbag back.

Just as the elevator doors were sliding open, Mo Qingcheng happened to lower his eyes to look at her. “They are a bit too rowdy. Since you aren’t actually in a hurry, I’ll grab something simple to eat with you first before I take you back to school.”

“Huh?” This suggestion was too frightening. She did not know how to handle it.

“What would you like to eat?”

“Huh?” Did she agree to his request?

Mo Qingcheng could not help letting out a laugh. “How about yan du xian [salted pork soup][1]?”

..... She swore, she was going to cry right then and there.....

“No objections?” He motioned for her to enter the elevator first. “Then yan du xian it is.”

\*

[1]腌笃鲜 “yan du xian.” A dish belonging to the Jiangnan area. 腌 “yan” means salted/cured . 笃 “du” means to stew over low heat. 鲜 “xian” describes the flavour and means fresh and delicate. The soup is made from a combination of both salt-cured and fresh pork



# Chapter 21: Yan Du Xian [Salted Pork Soup] (6)

Yan du xian. Toupai. Toupai. Yan du xian...

Even after the dish was brought out and served up onto the table, Gu Sheng was still feeling like she was in a fantasy. She, here alone, and Toupai, also alone, sitting face to face, having yan du xian soup..... T T. She wanted to be calm and dignified and not allow her mind to wander, but this was simply, totally their first meeting, ah... Obviously, that night in the grocery store when she had been holding her dog and watching him pay definitely could not be counted as a “real” encounter.

Yan du xian was her favourite dish, and she had to wait every year for the cold weather to come before she could have it. Positively one of the most wonderful things Gu Sheng looked forward to.

And then...

Well. The most wonderful food coupled with the most beautiful voice. Sitting together...

She used her chopsticks to stab at a bamboo shoot in front of her. Her first time having dinner with a boy that was neither a schoolmate nor a relative. What should she say? T T

She lifted her gaze.

At the same moment, Toupai happened to be reaching for food with his chopsticks and glanced at her. “What’s the matter?”

Nothing. T T Just that, Toupai, do you really think that such a peaceful, harmonious atmosphere without any speaking is a good thing for the first time having dinner together? You’re honestly not feeling awkward at all? ..... Gu Sheng blurted out, “The food is delicious here.”

Mo Qingcheng chuckled, “It is indeed delicious here.”

It was a simple and clean place and was also near the recording studio, less than a ten minute walk away ... It must be a place that Mo

Qingcheng and the others frequented?

"I really like yan du xian," Mo Qingcheng suddenly told her.

"Me too," Gu Sheng echoed. "But most of the time, my dad and mom just make it at home for me to eat. We rarely go out to have it."

"My parents are very busy with their work," he said casually. "It seems I've always cooked for myself. After I graduated and lived with Jue Mei, when I was too lazy to cook, we would go out together to eat."

Poor guy. T T

But he's so much taller than you, even when he's sitting... Gu Sheng, what's up with this mood of yours, like you're looking at a stray, unwanted cat? ... She lowered her head. Keep eating, keep eating.

"Have you tried to make it before?" Mo Qingcheng's voice was warm and gentle, as if he was having a casual conversation at the dinner table with an old friend... Wait, no, it really was a casual conversation at the dinner table. Just unfortunately, not with an old friend.

Gu Sheng shook her head in reply.

"It's really simple." He very naturally started to go over the recipe with her, and Gu Sheng also very naturally listened to him. "First, you blanch fresh bamboo shoot slices in hot water. Then you use cold water and briefly soak salted pork meat and cured bamboo shoots in it to remove some of the saltiness."

Nodding, she listened carefully to him, for the recipe itself but also for his ridiculously beautiful voice.

Mo Qingcheng picked out some of the more tender bamboo shoot tips and placed them in her bowl. Unhurriedly, he continued, "Next, put some scallions and ginger in cold water and bring it to a boil. Then add the salt-cured meat and some spare ribs. I also like to add salted pigs feet. When everything comes to a boil over high heat, skim off the foamy scum on top, and then cook it for twenty minutes to half an hour." He was recalling the recipe in his mind while saying, "After, you add both the cured and fresh bamboo shoots. When the soup becomes a milky white,

you turn the heat down to low and stew it for about an hour or so.”

“What about the dried bean curd knots[1]?” Gu Sheng asked.

He laughed, “Don’t be so anxious.”

.....

I’m not anxious...

Mo Qingcheng carried on, “Lastly, add the bean curd knots. Simmer it on low for about fifteen minutes before you sprinkle some chopped scallions on top. Then it can come out of the pot.”

She gave an “mm” in response.

She spooned some soup to drink. Delicious food paired with a beautiful voice. Such an indulgence...

When she was full and her entire body felt warm, Mo Qingcheng waved down the server for the bill. The server came over with a smile and handed the bill to him while asking, “Is she a voice actor as well, like you? She looks so young.”

Pulling out some money and placing it into the folder she was holding, Mo Qingcheng answered, “No, she is still a student.”

Gu Sheng smiled at the server.

From the looks of it, he was such a frequent customer that he and the restaurant staff could not get any more familiar than this. Probably the takeout that Toupai ordered when he was doing dubbing came from this restaurant, too?

“Oh,” the server said knowingly, like she understood something.

Mo Qingcheng smiled, tacitly affirming what the server had implied.

Amid this silent exchange, Gu Sheng felt genuinely embarrassed.

“Get dressed.” Mo Qingcheng had already risen to his feet and was holding his jacket as he explained, “It’s still quite a ways to your school. We might need to hurry up a bit.” When he was finished speaking, he once again picked up her heavy and bulging backpack as if it was

perfectly normal and expected.

Gu Sheng quickly stood up, wanting to tell him that she could carry it herself.

Her words had reached the tip of her tongue and she was just about to say them when a burst of gleeful laughter was heard coming from the doorway...

Without even needing to turn around to look, she broke out in cold sweat. Such a familiar sound, you know? T T

All you DaRens, do you really need to treat this like the local cafeteria? You know, you can occasionally have a change in tastes, k?...

“MO! QING! CHENG!” Fei Shao chortled loudly, “Weren’t you accompanying someone back to school? How come you’ve been ‘accompanying’ for 45 minutes now, and you’re still hanging around the recording studio, huh?”

“Don’t expose our Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen.” Dou Dou Dou Bing pulled off her scarf with a grin. “Was it tasty, Sheng Sheng? The food here is not bad, is it?”

Gu Sheng did not even dare open her mouth to speak, so she simply squeaked out an “mm” in reply.

“Yan du xian?” Wwwwk sauntered over, his eyes sweeping over the table. “Toupai, you are such a disloyal friend... I’ve been saying for the last two days now that I wanted to have yan du xian, but you refused to go eat it with me ...”

J

With a show of seriousness, Jue Mei placed a hand on his shoulder and told him, “There’s Sheng Sheng now. Who’d still want to eat with you?”

.....

.....

Everyone was chattering away delightedly.

Even the server was beaming like a blooming flower as she listened in.

Gu Sheng was dying from embarrassment. Quietly, she looked over at Toupai and said softly, "Let's go?"

He smiled, "Okay." Glancing over at Jue Mei, he stated, "Going now."

Jue Mei gave him a look that was meant to say, "Bro, you are free to come and go as you want; I'm not stopping you." Casually pulling out a chair, he sat down at a large, round table and instructed everyone, "Sit down, sit down. We'll just pretend we never saw Mo Qingcheng, eh. Don't make Sheng Sheng feel awkward. Then she won't want to come next time..."

.....

T T You can pretend for something like that?

And anyways, Jue Mei DaRen... you guys are done with your jokes already. Now that you've had your fun, you've finally noticed I feel awkward?...

In a rather resigned fashion, Toupai patted Jue Mei on the shoulder and then departed from there with Sheng Sheng, leaving the group behind them to their own delighted chortles and chatters as they continued to order their dishes for dinner.

The two of them caught the bus without any issues. It was already past eight o'clock at night so there were not many people, and the back half of the bus was empty. Together, they sat in the very last row. The two of them were the only people occupying that entire row of six seats.

"You sing so well. Why have you never gone into singing and only stuck with voice acting?" Gu Sheng had wanted to ask this question for quite some time now.

He, on the other hand, did not seem to place much regard on the issue. "Singing requires more effort."

.....

Alright.

The bus turned a corner. Their trip had only just begun.

She did not know what to say to Mo Qingcheng. They couldn't keep talking about vocal recording the whole time, right?....

But, besides singing and voice acting, she really did not know what she could talk to Toupai about.

After all, she couldn't go telling him that the lecturer for her two classes tomorrow morning was going to be that old teacher who could put people to sleep the instant he started his lessons, right?...

However, the good thing was, Toupai finally did not need to help her carry that heavy bag of hers any longer and had placed it on the empty seat next to him. At least... she did not need to feel guilty about that anymore.

Gu Sheng's thoughts were starting to wander. She began to contemplate how she could get to her bag first when it was time to get off the bus so that he would not actually have to carry it for her all the way back to her dormitory...

All of a sudden, she heard a quiet voice.

Very light, very relaxed. He was singing in a deep, pleasant voice.

She looked at him in surprise.

He, too, was looking at her, those deep black eyes with the upward-turned outer corners carrying the hint of a smile in them, as he casually sang.

The empty, spacious interior of the bus did not easily allow sound to transmit to the front, and therefore, in this moment, only she could hear Qiang Qing Ci singing "Ge Wei Yang" [Song Has not Ended]. It was a song very suitable for singing at night. Listening quietly to it, there was a sense of old Shanghai's languid, lavish atmosphere.

[[<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXrVCpHj85c>]]

The bus came to a stop at a red light.

His singing, however, did not stop.

As she listened, Gu Sheng felt as if she would not be able to breathe. It was too beautiful a voice ...

She quickly turned her head away and continued to fix her gaze on the view outside the window.

“Who is still nostalgically singing?

That familiar song has still not come to an end

The lights have been extinguished

The people have all left

But the longing continues to entangle

I am a wave, continuously drifting and pursuing

Occasionally coming to rest in your heart

I cannot slow my pace

Can only hurry along

Then suddenly, I have already crossed the ocean

.....”

As she listened to him, she thought, this was such a wonderful night.

Such a beautiful voice singing such a beautiful song.

T T If she could only record it, it would be even better...



[1]百叶结. Orig 'bai ye jie.' Literally meaning "a knot through a hundred sheets." When hot soy milk is exposed to the cooler air, a skin forms on the surface. This skin can be lifted off and dried to created a sheet of soy/tofu/bean curd skin. Dried bean curd knots, or tofu skin knots, are made by slicing the slightly moist bean curd skin into strips, tying a knot in each strip, and allowing to dry.

\*

#### Additional Comments:

Those who watched Shanghai Bund 2007 with Huang Xiao Ming should be familiar with the original female version (sung by Echo) of the song, 歌未央 [Song Has Not Ended], in this chapter. This particular male cover sung by 柯暮卿 was recommended by MBFB herself, although I didn't realize that until after I spent an afternoon listening to all the male covers out there and finally deciding this one was the best. If you visit the singer, 柯暮卿 5sing page for this song, the comments below are all



screaming, "Toupai DaRen!" "Qiang Qing Ci!!" "I came after reading the novel." "Hahaha. Everyone is here because of Toupai!"

Anyways, here's the translated lyrics.

[0:29] 是谁还留恋的吟唱

Who still is nostalgically singing?

[0:36] 那首熟悉的歌未央

That familiar song has still not come to an end

[0:43] 灯光已熄灭

The lights have been extinguished

[0:46] 人已散场

The people have all left

[0:50] 思念继续纠缠

But the longing continues to entangle

[0:57] 我是随波逐的浪

I am a wave, continuously drifting and pursuing

[1:04] 偶尔停泊在你心房

Occasionally coming to rest in your heart

[1:11] 放不慢脚步

I cannot slow my pace

[1:14] 只能匆忙

Can only hurry along

[1:17] 转瞬间已越过海洋

Then suddenly, I have already crossed the ocean

[1:26] 那些被淡忘的时光

Those times that have faded from memory

[1:32] 是否别来无恙

Are they still well since our parting?

[1:39] 他日若还能活过往

Perhaps in the future, I will still be alive, and what's left of the past

[1:45] 也许只剩一句轻叹

may only be a single sigh

[2:32] 我是随波逐的浪

I am a wave, continuously drifting and pursuing

[2:39] 偶尔停泊在你心房

Occasionally coming to rest in your heart

[2:46] 放不慢脚步

I cannot slow my pace

[2:49] 只能匆忙

Can only hurry along

[2:53] 转瞬间已越过海洋

Then suddenly, I have already crossed the ocean

[3:01] 那些被淡忘的时光

Those times that have faded from memory

[3:07] 是否别来无恙

Are they still well since our parting?

[3:14] 他日若还能活过往

Perhaps in the future, I will still be alive, and what's left of the past

[3:20] 也许只剩一句

may only be a single sentence

[3:28] 那些被淡忘的时光

Those times that have faded from memory

[3:35] 能否再来一段

May we relive them just once more

[3:42] 而我是不是还依然

And am I still

[3:48] 你曾经眷恋的模样

The same person you once yearned for?

## Chapter 22: Yan Du Xian [Salted Pork Soup] (7)

When the two of them arrived on her campus, many people and cars were coming and going in front of the graduate student dormitory.

Everyone was returning back to school today, and many old, familiar faces, flush with a rosy glow from eating, drinking, and being merry over the winter holidays, brushed past them.

After greeting a few people along the way, Gu Sheng sensed that she could not let this continue. Nearly everyone who said hello to her would give her a look afterwards that seemed to say, “Sheng Sheng Man, you are one lucky girl” ... Toupai was walking leisurely beside her and admiring her campus, as if he did not mind in the least all those gazes that were both openly and secretly eyeing him over.

If... those fans of his in the 2-D world found out that ... their very own Toupai DaRen was being ogled by so many girls, they would definitely band together and all take headshots at her, k? T T

She stopped.

Mo Qingcheng also stopped.

“Here is good enough. Thank you... um, you.”

DaRen, please don't ask to go up and look around my dorm...

Today was the only day that the dormitory building was freely open for anyone to come and go. Please, please don't ask, or else I don't know how I'll be able to refuse you, aaah ...

“Alright.” He finally handed her backpack back to her. “See you next time.”

“Mm. Bye.”

At last carrying her own bag again, she turned around.

Step by step by step by step, she walked forward. Didn't dare to look

back. So wanted to look back. Didn't dare to look back. So wanted to look back... The backpack she was hugging in front of her was honestly so darn heavy. If she had known ahead of time that Toupai would be carrying it the whole way, she would not have brought so many snacks. You glutton, Sheng Sheng Man. Look! You've exhausted Toupai. T T

Finally, she made it into her dormitory building, past the glass doors, where she took a couple steps to the left and then furtively turned back around. From a corner where Mo Qingcheng could not see her, she looked back out to see if he had left yet.

It seemed Mo Qingcheng had watched her enter the building, and now, he cast a glance at his watch.

"Gu Sheng!" From outside the dormitory building, Geng Xiaoxing's voice suddenly rang out. "Who are you looking at, hiding beside the door like that? A handsome guy?!"

.....

.....

Let me die... Oh Heaven and Earth, hurry and send a lightning bolt down to strike me, please...

Frozen in place, Gu Sheng watched as Geng Xiaoxing bounced and skipped her way up to her. In her peripheral vision, she could see Mo Qingcheng very clearly lower his arm. With an amused expression, he cast a glance over in the direction of where she was concealed before turning around and leaving.

.....

.....

He must have heard. For sure he heard. T T

"Why are standing here so stupidly? You were fine on the phone yesterday." Geng Xiaoxing beamed at her as she stretched out her hand and waved it in front of her face. "Tell me now! What happened in your meet-up with Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen, huh?"

Gu Sheng threw a wordless glance at her.

“Jue Mei just sent me a message in WeChat. Daren personally escorted you back to the school? Whoa, you guys are progressing really quickly ...” Geng Xiaoxing’s tone was filled with all sorts of envy. “Is Toupai really that handsome?”

Gu Sheng continued staring at her in silence.

After suffering through several hours of shock and incitement, she did not have the energy to deal with anything Geng Xiaoxing had to say. All she could think about was that Geng Xiaoxing’s loud mouth had utterly destroyed the image she had tried so hard to maintain through the afternoon and evening.

Peeping out secretly at him. So humiliating.

Of the four people in her dormitory room, only the two of them were directly being admitted into postgraduate studies. The remaining two roommates had already headed off to internship positions.

They likely were not going to return until tomorrow to go through the motions of reporting back into school and then head right back to their jobs.

As a result, tonight it was just the two of them again.

Geng Xiaoxing tried several different ways of trying to probe out some information but to no avail, so eventually, she turned the focus of the conversation directly to Jue Mei. Gu Sheng finally relented and, sitting on her bed reading through her YY messages, she said, “Very tall. Um... Really domineering air. Super domineering... Anyways, as long as he’s not joking around, he has a huge amount of presence.”

And when he is joking around T T, he is like a triad boss... A cultured type of triad boss.

“Ooh ...” Geng Xiaoxing climbed onto the ladder of her bed, but then stayed there, almost half-sprawling herself on the rungs while she held onto the head of the bed for support. “Tell me more.”

Gu Sheng very dutifully contemplated for a moment before saying, “How about next time you just come along with me? ... You guys have been having your underground relationship for so long anyways.”

“We don’t have an underground relationship!” Geng Xiaoxing made a grab for Gu Sheng’s foot in protest.

As she rolled out of the way, Gu Sheng chortled, “It is so an underground relationship!”

Geng Xiaoxing crawled up threw herself completely onto Gu Sheng’s bed.

“Don’t, don’t!” Gu Sheng pointed at her computer. “I’m holding my computer. Don’t break it.”

Geng Xiaoxing carefully avoided her computer. Suddenly, she clued in to something. “When is the next time you’re going to meet again?”

“Huh?”

“Didn’t you say ‘next time’?”

.....

Gu Sheng did not know why she had said “next time.” Maybe it was because Toupai had said “see you next time”?

She stammered for a little bit until she saw a message from the president of her music association: Sheng Sheng Man, where did you go? ..... Tonight was supposed to be your night on singing duty. I’ve been holding the fort for you for half an hour already... Hurry up and come!

She was taken aback briefly but then quickly remembered. Tonight was her night on singing duty for her own music association, ah T T...

“I can’t talk with you now. Can’t talk now. I need to go sing...” Slipping on her headphones, she explained in a very guilty tone, “Today was my turn to do singing duty for my association... and I completely forgot.”

The look on Geng Xiaoxing’s face showed that she was relishing in a certain someone’s predicament, but she finally let her go.

When Gu Sheng entered the YY channel, she immediately heard the association president plaintively singing the song, “Ling Wu” [“Realization”] with a small voice filled with mournfulness. When he saw her name pop up, he instantly cried, “Sheng Sheng Man DaRen... you’ve finally come.”

Gu Sheng typed back: I forgot...

Association president: “Head straight up onto your mike... I’m nearly out of breath from singing so much. Everyone, please wait a minute. We are going to change singers right away.”

Gu Sheng private messaged the association president: Um... Weren’t there supposed to be two of us on singing duty? Where’s Zou Diao’er?

The president private messaged her back: He said he had a date. He said, in his twenty years of life, this was the first time that the person professing love to him was not a male and was actually a girl. So, he absolutely, positively had to make it to his date...

Gu Sheng: ..... Best wishes to him.

Association president: I held the fort for you for half an hour. Sing as you wish for another hour and then retreat.

Gu Sheng: Okay.

The association president got off his microphone and started to wind down. Gu Sheng got onto her microphone and a couple of songs, casually humming along while perfunctorily collecting virtual roses. The music association she was in was small and did not have a fixed fan base, and hence, every week, there were two days in which singers from the association would sing on the association’s channel to try to increase popularity. Placing her laptop on the small computer desk, she seated herself properly in front of it, her legs curled up to her chest, and started to sing.

While she was singing away, she heard an alert from her mobile phone.

Still singing her song, she rapped on her bed at Geng Xiaoxing, motioning for her to hand the phone to her.



When she took it, she saw that Toupai had sent over a text message: I've arrived home.

.....

She immediately sang off key.

Clearing her throat, she said, "Excuse me. I'm just going to answer my phone."

The background music was continuing to play as she replied to his WeChat message: Good to hear that you're home... Thank you for accompanying me back today ^^

She pressed send. For some reason, though, something did not feel quite right.

Yet, she could not quite place what was wrong... It seemed as if she and Toupai had suddenly taken a huge step forward and had progressed to a stage where they were very familiar with one another. But, besides knowing that his name was Mo Qingcheng and that he was the Internet's famous Qiang Qing Ci DaRen, she honestly did not know anything about him at all...

She tossed her mobile phone aside and began flipping through her folder on her computer, trying to find a song to sing.

While she was still thinking, she somehow unconsciously opened up the background music to "Song Has Not Ended."

[[<https://youtu.be/KvwmjOggOaI>]]

Having listened to it not long ago, it was still deeply impressed on her mind, so she decided she might as well take advantage of this opportunity to practice it. Of course... she would definitely not be able to sing it like Toupai, with such feeling and so perfectly. She followed along with the lyrics, singing gently.

Out of the blue, she heard the association president's voice excitedly interrupt, "Ah! Am I seeing things? How did we suddenly break 1000 listeners in such a short period? I'll say... Hey girls, have you all come to

the wrong channel?..."

Gu Sheng was taken aback.

"Mr. President, you're not seeing things..." Zou Diao'er's voice rang out. "I feel like I rushed back for nothing..... AH, AH, AH, AH! What did I just see?! My idol and god! Toupai DaRen!"

"Where, where? Where's Toupai Daren? Daren, you really have graced us with your presence here! ... Soooo touched!"

Gu Sheng instantly understood. And instantly did not know how to sing anymore...

Toupai...

Toupai came...

The problem was, she was singing "Song Has Not Ended," the song he had just sung on the bus, AH, AH, AH, AH!

On the public comment screen, Qiang Qing Ci very simply typed a smiley face.

Straightaway, there were more than a hundred comments of "Ah, ah, ah, ah! Screen cap!" ...

"DaRen, our association is going to be having a one year anniversary celebration concert very soon. May I invite you to it? Ah, may I invite you?" The association president was not able to keep his cool in the least bit...

Qiang Qing Ci typed another smiley face: If I am not too busy with work, I will likely be there.

Immediately, there were more than a hundred comments of "Ah, ah, ah, ah! Concert!" ...

Gu Sheng honestly felt she could not keep herself together any longer. She let the background music play away as she buried her face into her knees. She was so embarrassed she wanted to die... This entire night, she had basically embarrassed herself enough to last her whole lifetime, you know, you know? T T

# Chapter 23: Spicy Crispy Skin Fish (1)

She heard the alert indicating there was a private message.

Lifting up her head, she saw the screen was being inundated with comment after comment of love declarations. The senior manager of Qiang Qing Ci's YY channel was there, working continuously to maintain order. "Calm down, calm down. You can't spam the screen on someone else's channel, eh..... Alright, kids..... If you keep spamming, I'm going to have to come back tomorrow with gift in hand to apologize T T....." Her eyes seemed as if they were seeing everything in a blur, mainly because there were so many online users. If each person made even only one comment, there was no possible way to keep up.

"How come DaRen isn't saying anything? ( ◡ ◡ ◡ ) AH! Maybe he's having a private chat session with Sheng Sheng?....."

"They must be private chatting..."

"What do you think they're talking about?"

"I heard that they had their in person meet-up today????"

( ◡ ◡ ◡ )

( ◡ ◡ ◡ )

How did somebody know that???? I just got back to the school not that long ago, you know? T T

Gu Sheng was already starting to feel she could not hold up any longer. Suddenly, she remembered that her private message window was still flashing. She thought it might be her association president or Zou Diao'er or someone like that, but it unexpectedly turned out to be Toupai.

Toupai: My phone's battery is dead, so I just dropped by here to say a quick hi.

Gu Sheng: ^^Okay.

Toupai disappeared from the channel very shortly after.

So many Toupai fans were still there. She truly was having a hard time

digesting this all, and tearfully, she begged Zou Diao'er to take over for her. Inspired by his idol and god, Zou Diao'er immediately got onto his microphone, and Gu Sheng fled the scene right away. Indeed, getting to Toupai's status had its disadvantages: everywhere you went, a group of kids would follow you around and, in an instant, they could flood the screen of someone else's channel with comments...

Her mind in a whirl, she exited out of YY.

She began to organize the things she needed for class tomorrow. Geng Xiaoxing was sitting with a radiant smile on her face in front of her own desk, and seeing from the corner of her eye Gu Sheng climb down from the bed, she suddenly said into her headset microphone, "Sheng Sheng's getting off her bed now." When she finished saying this, she pulled her headset plug out of the jack to allow the audio to come through on her speakers, deliberately letting Gu Sheng listen in.

Jue Mei's voice quickly came back through the computer speakers. "Hmm, Toupai's gone off to take a shower. Those two are truly in sync with each other."

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Gu Sheng bared her teeth menacingly at Geng Xiaoxing, mouthing a silent threat: "You are so dead."

Jue Mei Sha Yi's voice was heard again shortly. "The video game promotional video we did the dubbing for was just released."

Geng Xiaoxing put on her headphones again. "Let's carry on. I type, you talk, though. Otherwise, Sheng Sheng will hear what I say..."

.....

.....

Fine. She was thin air.

However, Gu Sheng was still rather curious about that promotional

video Jue Mei had mentioned. Large-scale type promotions such as this one usually generated extremely high-quality productions and were definitely worth collecting. And anyways... she remembered that Toupai had said he had participated in it as well. While she was opening up her computer, she cast a guilty glance at Geng Xiaoxing, who was enthusiastically rattling away on her keyboard. A question suddenly popped into her mind that piqued her curiosity: Jue Mei Sha Yi had hung out in this online show business for many years now, so how was it that he ended up getting reined in by a girl from outside the entertainment circle?

This world was truly remarkable.

(|||¬ω¬)

She switched on her computer again and headed over to Toupai's Weibo page. Sure enough, an official video had just been posted.

Oh, so it was that video game.

She looked at the official channel of the game and saw that a series of couple-focused videos had been released.

It was truly a series.

Toupai had retweeted the one he had worked on. When she opened it up, she instantly heard the soul-stirring background music, a very desolate, sorrowful tune. An ink and wash painting gradually transformed into the story's male and female leads whom Mo Qingcheng and Dou Dou Dou Bing had provided the voices for. Their two voices, coupled with images taken from the video game, created an atmosphere that was completely different from the fun, cheery setting of this afternoon.

From when the two leads first met to how they both grew to have feelings for one another to finally... their separation.

The character Toupai had voiced walked from the light into darkness.

The girl rushed after him and told the retreating outline of his back, "I will wait for you to come back."

In the video, the man, his garments fluttering in the wind, gave a very light “mm.” Then, without turning to look back, he disappeared into the darkness.

The music in the background was simply too mournful and caused this parting to feel...

Gu Sheng blinked her eyes rapidly. Her nose was tingling.

From behind her, someone tapped her on the shoulder. She turned around and looked at Geng Xiaoxing with red eyes. “Yes?”

“What’s the matter? ... Friend Sheng Sheng...” Geng Xiaoxing had originally intended on asking if she wanted to have a late night snack or something, but when she saw the look on her face, she was alarmed. “Had an argument with Toupai? No wonder you got off your mike so quickly...”

“What are you talking about? ...” Gu Sheng slapped away her hand gloomily. “I must play this video game. This trailer is so touching... But, it’s a tragic ending... And it’s that kind of tragedy where you’ve got a mouthful of blood that’s stuck in your chest and you can’t spit it out or swallow it back down...”

That’s the most painful type, you know? T T

Geng Xiaoxing was thrilled about this. “You actually got all red-eyed after watching the promotional video dubbed by Toupai?”

She did not want to admit to this, but the video was still open and right there on her screen... There was no way she could deny it, k?..... Geng Xiaoxing was immediately gleeful. “Ah, ‘tis true love, indeed... Ah, true love...”

“You are not allowed to tell Jue Mei.” Gu Sheng still managed to remember her dignity.

“He’s listening in already.” Geng Xiaoxing pointed at her computer. “I told him only you and I are in our dorm room. He said, since we all knew each other anyway, might as well just turn on the mike...”

.....

.....

“Can you please shut off your mike first?” Gu Sheng felt extremely depressed.

Geng Xiaoxing quickly clasped her hands together and bowed, then turned her microphone off.

“But it’s no big deal.” Geng Xiaoxing put on a show of solemnness. “Supposedly, many, many girls shed tears tonight after watching the video. Jue Mei even said, Toupai really knows how to choose his projects, doing a tragic story, unlike him where the character he provided the voice for is completely unromantic.”

Toupai seemed to be someone who loved deeply and steadfastly. And his low voice especially showed that...

Jue Mei, on the other hand...

Gu Sheng unashamedly mocked him silently. Jue Mei was indeed suited for those unromantic, insensitive roles. Who else could possibly compete with him on those?...

With her head resting in her hands, she sat there and watched the video over and over again.

After watching it several times, she was already able to hum the melody of the video game’s theme song. She was even starting to consider rearranging the accompaniment to the song as a gift to Toupai... And if he could sing a cover of it, that would be soooo wonderful.

While she was still lost in her thoughts, her WeChat alert beeped. It was Toupai: I can finally turn on my phone again. I just reposted the promotional video for a video game.

Gu Sheng was still immersed in the tragic atmosphere. Seeing Toupai’s message made her think of the silhouette in the video that had gradually walked further and further away into the darkness. Without even thinking, she replied to him with her idea: I saw it. I want to rearrange the song... as a gift to you. Such a touching video.

After she sent off the message, she grew somewhat antsy.

Certainly, the number of people who wanted to arrange a song and invite Toupai to sing was so many that the people were probably all falling over one another... As for her, she was just an unknown. Who knew if her arrangement would be good enough for Toupai's standards?

Toupai sent back a simple, "Sure."

Only then did she settle down.

It was nearly time for bed, but she still could not bear it and opened up the promotional video one more time.

By the time she was finally about to shut down the webpage, Toupai's Weibo surprisingly had a new post. It was a PaPa[1] upload, and the photo used was a nighttime shot of her university's library. Her heart unexplainably leapt a few times. She clicked on the photo and listened.

Toupai spoke rather leisurely:

"Just a little while ago, a girl cried after watching the promotional video. She said she wanted to make a new arrangement of the song for me. It made me remember the song I listened to on repeat when I was preparing to dub this video to get me emotionally prepared."

What song was it?

She grew increasingly curious.

Toupai did not continue speaking and instead, began to sing. It was only three or four lines.

[[[https://youtu.be/K34MRgR\\_YCO](https://youtu.be/K34MRgR_YCO)]]

"Sleepless this night, watching the lights as they wane

Singing a song, sheng sheng man [slow, long, drawn sounds]

My feelings are still warm, though we have parted

Alone, in thin, cold garments

.....



Alright. Everyone, good night.”

She clearly remembered the synopsis for this song, “Bai Shou” [A Head of White Hair]. As someone who shared his love for song, she could even share the same feelings he must have had before he provided the voice acting, when he was listening to this song. In the promotional video, she had said she would wait for him. He agreed, and then never looked back as he stepped into the darkness.

It is not important whether, after this parting, we can meet again. I understand your yearning. Even if I should be alone as my hair turns white, I will not feel lonely.

.....

Even now, as she thought about this again, her eyes once more started tingling with tears.

Oh no. Going to cry again. T T It honestly sucks to be a voice lover ...

\*

[1] 啪啪 ‘PaPa’ is a social networking app that integrates photos with audio recordings. Users can take a photo and then attaching audio directly to that photo, which can then be shared with friends or uploaded directly to Weibo, WeChat, QQ, and other social networking sites. See [papa.me](http://papa.me) or <https://itunes.apple.com/cn/app/id553749400?mt=8>

\*

### Additional Comments:

Hope you all understood what was going on at the end with the song and the way I did the translation. Toupai chose a song where the words, 声声慢 “sheng sheng man” were embedded in the lyrics. “Sheng sheng man” means a slow, drawn-out sound or voice, and in the case of this lyrics, it is saying, “A slow tune was sung with long, drawn-out notes.”

The song is called 白首 “Bai Shou” [Head of White Hair]. It is actually the ending theme song from a radio drama called 墨印 “Mo Yin,” which is based on a BL novel of the same name. Hence, that is why the song is a

duet of two male voices. I honestly don't know anything about the story. Song synopsis and lyric translation below. Lyrics are color-coded for each singer so you can follow the story of the song more easily. (Red for 墨, blue for 印, and green when they are singing together.)

Synopsis:

执手到白首，匆匆数十载，回首只觉不过一瞬。

一瞬，堪比永恒。

那一晚，他伫立在晚湖之前，不知想着什么，想着谁。

只知第二天的他，已经白首。

永恒，不过一瞬而已。

To hold that hand until your heads are white. Several fleeting decades, yet upon looking back, they seem only a moment.

An instant that can compare with eternity.

That night, he stood before the lake for a long time. What or who he was thinking about, no one knew.

The only thing that was known was that, the next day, his head of hair had turned white.

Eternity is merely an instant.

**【墨】梧桐细雨潇潇冷夜**

On the Chinese parasol tree, light rain drizzles, night so cold

**晚湖一樽誓言**

A night lake, a promise

一壶浊酒本缱绻

A bottle of unfiltered rice wine should have been filled with love and tender attachment

**奈何相守无缘**

But we are not fated to be together

【印】夜无眠看灯火阑珊

Sleepless this night, watching the lights as they wane

吟一曲声声慢

Singing a song in a long, drawn voice

情尚暖 人已散

My feelings are still warm, though we have parted

只身薄裳寒

Alone, in thin, cold garments

【墨】灿烂如昙花一现

Splendid as the orchid cactus, which blooms only briefly

【印】绽放在转身瞬间

Blossoming in the moment that we turn around and part our ways

【墨】你可知我心浮乱

Do you know my heart is drifting chaotically?

【印】一滴泪后心中断弦

The string of my heart has broken with the falling of a tear

【墨】隔帘相望不忍相见

Our gazes meet through the curtain, but we do not let ourselves greet each other

唯怨相逢太晚

And we can only fault fate that we met each other too late

已停在奈何桥边

I am already stopped beside the Naihe Bridge[a]

怎能许你诺言

How can I offer you any promises?

【印】月无影空照人影斜

The moon itself has no shadow, but its cold glow creates slanting shadows

护花叶终会凋谢

Leaves protecting the flower will eventually wither away

逝去的 仍牵绊

What has passed away still seems to entangle and impede

回首尽是从前

And turning back to look, my gaze is filled completely with things of the past

【墨】飘渺如过往云烟

Only dimly discernible, like the mists of our past

【印】久久萦绕我身边

Lingering and encircling me for so long

【墨】你可知我心思念

Do you know how my heart is longing?

【合】一方墨印烙上心田

A single ink stamp has branded itself onto my heart

【印】就让我独自承担

Let me alone bear

情深不寿的天谴

The punishment from Heaven for the deep love that was short-lived

徒留时光空流转

Trying in vain to hold back the passage of time

一夜便是经年

But in one night, the passing of many years has left its mark

【墨】相隔遥遥一水间

Separated by the distance of a river

想你柔柔笑靥

Remembering your gentle smile

晓梦残 梦难断

Dreams at dawn are incomplete, yet the dream will not break off

声嘶力竭呼喊

I cry out with a hoarse voice and in exhaustion

【墨】晚湖下等待相见(【印】晚湖上等待相见)

Waiting beneath the nighttime's lake for our reunion (Waiting on the nighttime's lake for our reunion)

【合】匆匆的光阴似箭

The swiftly passing time is like an arrow

【墨】知你知我的眷恋(【印】我知道你的眷恋)

I know you understand my yearning (I understand your yearning)

【合】独自白首也不孤单

Even if I should be alone as my hair turns white, I am not lonely

[a] 奈何桥. In Chinese folklore, after someone dies and enters the netherworld, he/she must pass over the Naihe Bridge. On this bridge, Old Lady Meng serves every soul that crosses the bridge a soup that erases all memories of the previous life and allows the soul to enter into the next incarnation.

## Chapter 24: Spicy Crispy Skin Fish (2)

She did not even have time to look at the comments before she was already bombarded one after another by @'s directed at her.

And most importantly, the first people who @ her were all those she had seen just this afternoon. Those types of closer friends were the ones who were the most blunt with their teasing...

Fei Shao: @ShengShengMan (◡‿◡) I remember that song came out a long time ago. You mean you guys met back then???? Whoa! Holy cr\*p...

Dou Dou Dou Bing: @ShengShengMan..... teary-eyed To anyone who is going to confess their love to me in the future, if you can't surpass Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen, please just turn yourself around and leave. T T

Wwwwk: @ShengShengMan Mark[1]. One face-to-face meet-up settles this Toupai DaRen down for the latter half of his life.

Feng YaSong: @ShengShengMan 'Til the different directions of the world no longer exist, 'til the seas dry, only then will I cease to love you or something like that...

Jue Mei Sha Yi: @ShengShengMan... This is a fairytale where a pot of yan du xian has won over the girl.

Geng Xiaoxing: @ShengShengMan Just feebly going to mark here...

.....

She had originally been completely absorbed in the song. Now that she had been hit by a string of @'s, she finally came out of her trance and was able to process the lyrics. "Singing a song, sheng sheng man [slow, long, drawn sounds]" wha-...?

"Toupai sure makes his move fast and gets things done quickly... I just went in and left a little mark..." Even Geng Xiaoxing was also staring at her computer in a daze. With eyes seeming as if they were seeing red hearts of love, she turned around to look at Gu Sheng. "I think these first 22 years of preserving your chastity has managed to touch even Heaven's

heart. The grand prize has been reserved for you..... Gawd, a love declaration like this, a love declaration like this! Ah! .... Ah, ah, ah, ah!" The more Geng Xiaoxing spoke, the more stirred up she became. She covered her face with her hands and shook her head furiously. "I can't take it anymore. Sooooo romantic!"

Heartbeat... Heartbeat, where have you gone? ...

She stood up and took a deep breath.

Deep breath again.

Heartbeat... Heartbeat, where have you gone? T.T ...

In all the comments beneath Toupai's post, the line, "Singing a song, sheng sheng man [slow, long, drawn sounds]" was popping up. Someone had even immediately recognized the location where the PaPa photo was taken and from this, started to deduce that either Gu Sheng or Toupai must be a student at that university...

She really did not know how to deal with such a predicament, so in the end, she simply closed her computer and pretended that she had not seen anything, anything at all. Whether Toupai had said that intentionally... or unknowingly... she honestly did not know. This Toupai DaRen had been immersed in this entertainment circle for so many years, yet he had always carefully guarded all of his personal information. So why was he suddenly starting to go high profile?...

If she were merely a spectator in this, she would definitely stand back and watch all of it enthusiastically.

Just like... Geng Xiaoxing, who was jumping up and down giddily right now...

But the question was, how did she manage to get pulled into this? %>\_<%

T.T Toupai... If you keep playing around like this, everyone is going to go nuts because of you, ah...

Fortunately, this was just the 2-D world. Once her computer was shut-off, everything would go away.

And fortunately, she had finished her part in recording the song, and her commitments to the website and Wanmei's collaborative anniversary celebration were completely fulfilled.

Except, when she reported back in to school the next day, she had an obvious bleary-eyed look. A teacher from her faculty stamped her student ID card and gave her an amused look. "Did you have too much fun over the winter break? But no worries. You and Geng Xiaoxing don't have any classes this semester anyway. Then, you'll be heading straight into post-graduate studies, so you've got a relatively lighter load than most people."

She gave an "mm" in reply. Last semester, ah.

Even though she would be moving into post-graduate studies immediately after, she still had a smidgen of melancholy that comes with graduating. But that little bit of sadness completely evaporated when she went back to her dormitory room and saw Geng Xiaoxing still enthusiastically refreshing her and Toupai's Weibo. She still needed to share a room with this girl for the next two years. Honestly... not even a hint of those pending-graduation emotions anymore.

"Sheng Sheng," Geng Xiaoxing grinned, "treat me to dinner."

"Why? ..."

"Even our school has been dug up now. What if one day, there's a 'let's all go to find Toupai's golden master' event? Won't you need me to keep my lips sealed?" Geng Xiaoxing beamed at her exultantly.

.....

"Valentine's Day is coming up soon, Sheng Sheng. Valentine's Day." When Gu Sheng was washing her hands, Geng Xiaoxing ran up behind her and reminded her of this.

"Yeah..." Gu Sheng answered her.

Wait. Oh no... Valentine's Day...

That song, Shang Ye, wasn't really going to be released, right??!!

She was going to be hunted down and killed for sure ( ◯ o ◯ ), aah!



Gu Sheng dried her hands and went to pick up her mobile phone. After hesitating briefly, she still sent a message to Toupai: You there (☺\_☺)?

She seemed to have gotten used to Toupai's habit of not responding immediately to messages. Tossing her phone to the side, she went online and started checking her emails. There were a few times when she had wanted to log into her Weibo, but scared that she would get agitated after seeing another huge number of messages or @'s, she decided to give up on that idea.

She counted up roughly how many song debts she still owed... Yep, already more than forty songs.

Sheng Sheng Man, you're the god of not following through on your commitments. T T

She opened up her software, trying to take advantage of this time, when Geng Xiaoxing was out for lunch and there was no one else in the dormitory, to finish off recording the songs she had practiced at home these last several days. But then, she discovered Toupai had left her a message on QQ.

Toupai: Want to go to the anime expo?

She glanced at the timestamp. The message had been left this morning.

Gu Sheng grew inexplicably anxious. Several hours had passed already... Would Toupai be unhappy she had not replied yet? ...

It was totally normal not to have replied yet... It wasn't like she was sitting in front of the computer all the time. ㄣ ( ͡ ▽ ͡ ) ㄣ But then, why was she so worried and so nervous? While she was still feeling anxious, Toupai's WeChat message had already replied back to her.

Mo Qingcheng's voice was heard against the background of what seemed to be somewhat of an open space, and this gave his voice a slight reverb in the message: "Did you see my message?"

"Yup, I just saw it." She immediately clarified the situation.

"Want to go to the anime expo?" Toupai's voice was still as alluring as

before.

Fine. Gu Sheng honestly felt that she had zero immunity to his voice.

Her most beloved idol. This was the power of the voice of one's most beloved idol.

.....

She stared at her mobile phone, her mind finally moving on to the next key point of his message...

So..... Toupai wanted to ask her out on a date? One-on-one? To go to the anime expo with him?

After not sleeping the entire night, Gu Sheng had already been feeling lightheaded. And now, she heard Toupai asking her whether she wanted to go to the anime expo... Could this be considered... a hint of some sort? She honestly did not want to read too much into things T T, but from last night to today...

Should she be allowed to read a teeny bit more into things?...

She leaned back into her chair, holding her mobile phone up in front of her with both hands, and listened to Toupai's "Want to go to the anime expo?" message one more time. She took some time to pull herself together before saying into her phone, "I've never been to one, but I've always wanted to go just to see... But, aren't you really busy?"

Once she sent the message, her heart already felt as if it was ready to jump out of her chest.

"I'm not very busy that day." Laughter could be heard in his voice.

"Sure, then." She honestly had never been to an anime expo and usually did not pay attention to when they took place, so what day was "that day"? ...

"Okay." Toupai leisurely answered the question that was on her mind, "This Saturday, I'll come and pick you up."

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Saturday. February 14th.

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[1] In Chinese online culture, the English word “mark” may be written in a thread of posts or comments as a waying saying, “I am leaving my mark here” or “Marking this to come back to later.”

## Chapter 25: Spicy Crispy Skin Fish (3)

Restless and nervous, she suffered through the next several days.

And, needless to say, she also wasted away those days, not able to record even a single song ... Luckily, it was nearing graduation time, and the university was starting to prepare for the graduation party. Her faculty was also having its own graduation celebration. Naturally, she was recruited into both events, being requested to play the guzheng for one and the piano for the other. Going to rehearsals was enough to whittle away quite a bit of time.

What was remarkable was, Geng Xiaoxing, who never before could be bothered to go back home, suddenly left for home on Friday.

As a result, on Friday night, Gu Sheng was the only one left in her dorm. At least she did not have to worry about dealing with Geng Xiaoxing's "Why aren't you going home this weekend?" questions ... But, there was no one there to discuss with her about how to handle this February 14th anime expo date either.

On this day, when everywhere seemed to radiate an atmosphere of romantic, floating pink bubbles, she felt that not dressing up elaborately would be disrespectful to Toupai ...

But if it had only been a coincidence that Toupai had chosen Valentine's Day to go to the anime expo and did not intend to take things further between the two of them, would it be inappropriate if her outfit were too extravagant?

Gu Sheng honestly felt she was going to be sick from having to make all these decisions.

Even the next day at midday, when Toupai sent a message saying he was outside her dormitory building, she was still staring at her pile of clothes not knowing which one to choose. But now that the situation had come to a head and she was in a pickle either way, she might as well let herself act like a starry-eyed girl this once!

In order to fit in with the anime expo, she decided to wear the only student uniform-style outfit she owned. She had purchased it last semester for the New Year's party. Speedily, she started changing into it: a white blouse paired with a yellow sweater, a yellow and green checkered skirt that came to her knees, dark green stockings, and dark green shoes... Lastly, she put on her white down coat... Too extravagant, wasn't it? T.T She stood in front of the sink, staring dazedly at herself in the dressing mirror.

After standing in front of the mirror for three seconds, her face suddenly flushed a bright red.

In the end, she forced herself to be thick-skinned, and putting on her backpack, she walked out. On a day like this, outside the dormitory, fancily dressed girls could be seen everywhere, as well as boys waiting in all sorts of different postures.

Gu Sheng's eyes glanced all around, but she could not find Mo Qingcheng.

While she was feeling a little bewildered, she suddenly heard someone call her name from far away. It was Toupai's voice. Searching in the direction from where it came, she finally saw Toupai, his eyes on her as he stood a ways off outside the Student Activity Centre with several other people. She walked over toward him and then discovered that one of the people with him was actually one of her senior brothers[1] in her faculty...

"Gu Sheng?" Senior Brother exclaimed delightedly. "Mo Qingcheng, the one you're waiting for is my junior sister[2]?"

Mo Qingcheng gave a nonchalant "mm."

Gu Sheng clutched her backpack straps tightly as she mumbled Senior Brother's name in greeting. She had not imagined at all that this type of situation would happen, where the instant she left the door, she would run into a faculty senior brother...

Senior Brother was apparently very well acquainted with Mo Qingcheng and could not help clearing his throat and teasing, "You are my senior schoolmate from high school. Gu Sheng is my junior sister from un ... You

tell me, ha ha, how am I supposed to sort out our seniority ranking? Ha ha ha ha!"

( ◡ ◡ ◡ )

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Mo Qingcheng smiled and gave him a pat on the shoulder. This dear friend, who had originally wanted to continue laughing, immediately curbed his mirth and hastily fawned, "Of course, seniority will be counted from you, Senior Brother first. I'll call her Sister-In-Law ... Sister-In-Law ..."

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.....

.....

Oh Lord, who could come shut him up, ah?...

Thankfully, Mo Qingcheng did not seem to want to let him carry on with his teasing. He asked instead whether Gu Sheng was ready to go. Gu Sheng hurriedly nodded in response and then docilely walked away with Mo Qingcheng. Along the way, from the dormitory building to the university's main gate, the two of them casually chatted on and off. Amid the enthralling sound of Toupai's voice, Gu Sheng could not stop stealing glances at him.

He was dressed in light blue trousers, a black jacket, and a white collared shirt...

So simple...

So handsome...

Mm... so, so handsome T.T

Gu Sheng, that's enough, you...

"What's the matter?" Toupai seemed to have sensed her gaze and lowered his head to look at her walking beside him.

“Uh... I was just thinking about my idea to rearrange that song for you,” Gu Sheng answered in a very proper manner, trying to save some face for herself.

Mo Qingcheng seemed to be smiling. She did not dare peek at him anymore.

She had thought the two of them would be taking the bus, and only when they reached the main gates of the university did she realize that Mo Qingcheng had driven over to pick her up. According to Toupai, February 14th was an extremely busy and crowded day, and if they did not drive, he was afraid it would be very troublesome to take her back home that night. Gu Sheng completely agreed with the first half of his sentence. As for the second half... she had to find a way to get out of it. Otherwise, if the nosy aunties in her community compound saw them, the whole situation would escalate to the level of a household interrogation T.T

Mo Qingcheng parked the car in a community compound that was near the exhibition centre. She discovered that, as Mo Qingcheng drove through the main gate of the compound, the security guard could not even be bothered with them. And after the car was inside, he seemed very familiar with the route as they drove to the parking space. So that meant... This couldn't be the community compound his home belonged to, could it?!

Toupai's home address...

Toupai's home address... She actually found out so easily where he lived T.T.....

She glanced around at the quiet surroundings. This seemed a bit like a dream. So this was where he and Jue Mei lived? While she was speculating, Toupai had already parked the car and unfastened his seatbelt. “This is where my parents live. It's relatively close to the exhibition hall where the expo is being held. Leaving the car here will be more convenient.”

She was even more surprised by this and took a look around again.

This was where Toupai had grown up and lived while he was still a student?

As she carefully observed the area, Mo Qingcheng called out to her. She turned around. Mo Qingcheng's dark eyes that looked as if they had been dabbed with ink were looking at her. "Take down my mobile number. If it's too crowded and we somehow get separated, it'll be easier to find each other."

Gu Sheng gave an "okay" in reply, pulled out her mobile phone, and input a string of numbers into it.

And then... After hesitating briefly, she dialed the number.

Very soon, the ringing sound of a mobile phone was heard beside her. When her call came in, he pulled out his phone and quickly typed in the two characters, "Sheng Sheng" to save the number ... She, however, wavered when it came to the step of entering his name. Toupai? Qiang Qing Ci? Mo Qingcheng? It seemed the last one was the safest. With the first two, if someone happened to see it, his mobile phone number would immediately be compromised.

Mo Qingcheng. Mo Qingcheng...

She suddenly remembered what Jue Mei had said. 3-D world. It was better to address him by his 3-D world name.

Right now, things... truly were happening in the 3-D world.

And so... she and Toupai had now exchanged all of their contact information. She even knew which community compound his parents lived in ( ◯ o ◯ ) .....

This was her first time at an anime expo. When she first stepped through the doors, the huge throngs of people caused her head to spin. Taking off her jacket and hugging it close to herself, she blindly followed after Mo Qingcheng's footsteps while taking in these fresh new surroundings. Mo Qingcheng also glanced around, and due to his height advantage, he could completely disregard ninety percent of the people. Before long, he was asking her what she was particularly interested in



seeing.

She thought about it briefly. “The Legend of Qin. I’ve been catching up with this one lately.”

Mo Qingcheng smiled as he looked at her and said in a low voice, “What a coincidence.”

Coincidence? What was a coincidence?

Gu Sheng did not have time to ask before he was already leading her towards that display booth. It seemed this particular one was especially popular of late, and they possibly would not even be able to squeeze their way up to the booth. Mo Qingcheng looked out over the hordes of people surrounding the display area. Just as he was considering how he was going to bring Gu Sheng over there, someone beside the display booth who was about to do a performance noticed Mo Qingcheng. Immediately, that person’s eyes brightened, and he squeezed his way out through the crowd.

Since that person was actually cosplayer, Mo Bai [White Ink], the people who were looking at the display soon forcefully created a way for him so he could gruelingly, but successfully pass through ... But even as he was charging through, the pathway would immediately close up tightly behind him ...

“Oh my, oh my!” Mo Bai was exhilarated, but he still managed to control the volume of his voice. Acting furtive, like he was a thief, he blissfully put his hand on Mo Qingcheng’s shoulder. “Oh my, oh my! You actually bestowed us with your presence...”

Gu Sheng stared at this exquisite-looking and famous cosplayer, Mo Bai, feeling like a little unknown person watching the excitement from the sidelines as one big god met another big god...

“I happened to have some time today, so I came to look around.” Mo Qingcheng’s gaze shifted over towards Gu Sheng, and seeing that she had been forced back half a step by the crowd already, he very naturally wrapped his arm around her shoulders and fished her back from amid the mass of people.

Toupai's... His...

Toupai's... hand... was resting on her shoulder...

Gu Sheng exhaled discreetly, feeling the weight of his hand on her.

She stood there beside him, feeling as if her entire shoulder did not belong to her ...

Mo Qingcheng did not even seem to notice anything. With a smile at Mo Bai, he said, "This is—"

All of a sudden, background music started playing. The display booth's performance was beginning.

[[<https://youtu.be/Ju1WAFbfUkM>]]

"Sheng Sheng Man, right?" Mo Bai completed the sentence for him in a lowered voice. His eyes were turned up in a smirk as he teased Mo Qingcheng, "You've kept yourself low key forever, except this one time where you've gone high profile. The whole world knows..."

Suddenly, there was a burst of squealing.

Mo Bai grinned and whispered to Gu Sheng, "Your man's voice acting part is starting."

Sure enough, from the sound system on the stage, Toupai's spoken lines for this performance echoed out. "How many Qixi[3] nights have passed? Alone, I liberally drink dukang wine[4], melancholy beneath the moonlight..." The low, forlorn voice rang out from the speakers.

Gu Sheng's cheeks and ears burned bright red from Mo Bai's words ...

She remembered this song, "Qi Han" [Seven Cold Nights] was an old song. At one point, she had also loved the arrangement of the musical accompaniment for it... She had never expected it would be chosen to be used in a special program at this event. Neither had she expected that Toupai would personally do the voice acting for this event...

Toupai's fingers moved slightly, as if he was trying to find a more comfortable position as he encircled her shoulders.

Gu Sheng did not dare move in the least bit. She felt completely like her soul had detached from her and flown off somewhere.

Many of the people surrounding the booth were Toupai's ever-faithful fans. Sounds of "Shh, be quiet. Listen to the spoken lines," continually could be heard. These were good, well-behaved fans who would put a stop to each other's squeals and who supported their idol with solemnity. However, they did not know that this idol of theirs was openly standing right there with them ...

Mo Bai immediately grinned and gave her a look.

The meaning behind it: You see? Toupai's fans are all surrounding this place. You'd better be careful, Sheng Sheng Man ...

\*

[1] 师兄 "shi xiong." This is how one would address a senior, male fellow student.

[2] 师妹 "shi mei." This is how one would address a senior, female fellow student.

[3] 七夕. The Qixi Festival falls on the seventh day of the seventh month on the lunar calendar. Also called Double Seventh Day or Chinese Valentine's Day. It celebrates the yearly reunion in Chinese mythology of Niulang, a mortal cowherd and his wife, Zhinu, a fairy and daughter of the Jade Emperor of Heaven, who are separated by the Milky Way and can only see each other one night a year, on Qixi.

[4] 杜康. A wine with ancient origins in China, dating back thousands of years. It is said to have been invented by Du Kang. However, since Du Kang is regarded as the forefather of wine making, any good wine may sometimes also be called a "dukang."

\*

Additional Comments:

The song doesn't really make a big appearance in the novel, but the atmosphere it creates is compellingly sorrowful so I decided to translate it

anyways. (The language of this song is very poetic and was challenging for me, so hopefully I didn't butcher it too badly.) It's a storyline song, supposedly based on the story of the Prince of Lanling, but it seems only very loosely so (and has nothing to do with the drama starring Feng Shao Feng). The lines are spoken by the Prince of Lanling, Gao Changgong.

高长恭：是第几个七夕之夜，余我一人豪饮杜康，月下惆怅。冷儿，我已在这一世等了七年，耗了七年，更是念了七年，却始终寻不到你的踪迹...

Gao Changgong: How many Qixi nights have passed? Alone, I liberally drink dukang wine, melancholy beneath the moonlight. Ling'er, This life, I have already waited seven years, wasted away seven years, and even moreso, missed you for seven years, yet I still have not been able to find even a hint of your whereabouts.

(Female)

花灯摇曳轻上楼

The flickering lights of the colored lanterns sway gently upstairs

弦歌延画巷夜色透

Singing resounds. Paintings are being made. Lights and colors fill the night lane.

举杯梦醉窗琼户牖

Cups are raised in toasts. Drunken dreams are taking place within these elaborate windows, doors, and walls

谁人忘忧

Who forgets their worries?

(Male)

墨香纸扇扇习习风

Sweet smell of ink. Paper fan swaying, bringing a gentle wind

朱笔微点绛唇一抹

A brush dabs down and sweeps lightly across the lips

镜中人影映烛 火瘦

The candle shines upon the slender reflection in the mirror

胭脂红 胭脂错

Her rouge is bright, her rouge is not right

(Together)

一曲萧杀凄凉奏

A lonely tune has the power to kill

纠一念破九千情仇

Fixated on one single thought, nine thousand other emotions are destroyed

执一怨悵三戒难求

Holding onto a single grievance, hence unable to adhere to the three disciplines[a]

胡为愁 胡为忧

Why worry? Why be sorrowful?

红卷裹墨香束玄轴

The words written in ink have been rolled and tied up into the red scroll

风浊清泪饮相思酒

The wind is dusty but the tears that fall are clear as I drink from a wine of yearning

湿罗绸 怎解伊人愁

The silk handkerchief soaked in tears still cannot lessen the beauty's sorrow

情一斗 卿能知否

Beloved, do you know the breadth of my love for you?

(Male)

自古杀伐皆是误谬

Throughout history, war has never been the right solution

倾尽情义把仇更仇

One gives all his heart into it, yet causes enmity to become deeper  
enmity

拨乱善恶将修罗修

Bring order to good and evil. Restore goodwill

忘忧忘忧

To forget worries, forget worries

(Female)

寒彻清霜凝血令稠

The cold is penetrating. The clear frost can freeze the blood and bring  
worry

冷容颜难鉴往昔柔

The tender expression of the past cannot be found on that cold  
countenance

七夕夜寒却奈何舟

The Qixi night is cold, but [you have] passed on already

无常候 谁赎救

Now that you have departed, who can save us?

(Together)

梦难忘乞巧指勾

The dream is hard to forget. Those skillful fingers moved

穿红针月别花容羞

To thread the red needle. Moon, do not be bashful

计蛛网条条去年秋

Counting each thread of the cobwebs, letting time pass by

今日瞅 难执手

Today, I can no longer hold your hand

谁惜红颜却成白头

Who cherished the beauty, who in the end only had a head of white hair?

花开枝头剩几瓣留

Flowers blossomed on the branches, but how many petals now remain?

裂丝罗解系散红豆

Tear the silk handkerchief, undo all ties, let love go

断丝藕 斩尽缠愁

Cut the bonds of love, sever all sorrows

高长恭：画舫之外花灯摇曳、轻歌曼舞好不热闹。奈何天下之大，却独留我一人歌着《柒寒》，无人相伴。冷儿可知，这临安城的山水缺了你，便不再临安了.....

Gao Changgong: Outside the brightly painted pleasure-boat, colorful lanterns sway. There is singing and dancing – such a lively scene. But though the world is vast, I am left alone, singing “Seven Cold Nights”, no one beside me. Ling’er, do you know that, without you, the scenery of this city of Lin’an does not bring peace?

七年七夕月夜月光寒

Seven years, seven Qixi Festivals with moonlit nights where the moonlight was cold

杜康又浇愁

Dukang wine drowned the sorrows

相忆否

Do we remember?

纤云丝扣清风藏袖

Delicate clouds hold back the cool breeze in their sleeves

华灯烟火依旧

The lanterns and fireworks are still as before

高长恭：若这生死轮回都不能再与你相见，我到情愿一死……早知如此，又何苦累得青眉耗尽真气为我移魂异世呢。

Gao Changgong: If we cannot meet again through reincarnation, then I would rather choose death…… If I had known this would be our destiny, why did I need to trouble Qing Mei to exhaust her powers to transport my soul to this other life?

暖壶酒 驱散风冷月夜寒

Warm some wine to dispel the cold of the wind and night

系红线 盼得三生有你伴

Tie tight the red thread[b], hoping that you will be by my side for three lives

从此后 青竹泛舟有君 不羡鸳鸯 不羡仙

And from henceforth, you will be with me as we ride rafts of bamboo, not envying the love of mandarin ducks nor envying the immortals

奏一曲 水调歌头忘七寒

Playing “Shui Diao Ge Tou[c]” song to forget about those seven cold nights

系红线 盼得三生有你伴

Tie tight the red thread[b], hoping that you will be by my side for three lives

(Female)

最可惜 今生只可忆临安

Unfortunately, this life, we can only remember Lin'an in our memories

来世 再来蓄满

Next life, let us make more to store up again

[a] 三戒. ‘san jie.’ Three things to guard against or three actions that



must be followed. Depending on what one is referencing (e.g. Buddhism, historical teachings, Chinese medicine), these disciplines may be different, but they can include things like abstaining from sexual misconduct, contention, coveting, telling untruths, excessive anxiety, excessive anger, overindulgence, intoxication, etc.

[b] In Chinese mythology, Yue Lao, or “Old Man Under the Moon” ties a man and a woman together with a red silk thread, and henceforth, nothing can stop the couple from being together.

[c]水调歌头. A traditional, generic Chinese melody to which any poem written following the ‘ci’ genre can be sung.

## Chapter 26: Spicy Crispy Skin Fish (4)

Right now, Toupai's fans had become as substantial to her as floating clouds ...

At this moment, besides Toupai's hand that was resting on her shoulder, to her, everything else was just floating clouds, oh, floating clouds. T.T

The spoken lines and the singers' voices interwove amongst each other. The cosplayers on stage were acting out the story. This could be considered the opening performance to warm-up the crowd, and Toupai's voice was being used to start the show. And that person who was the highlight... was standing beside Gu Sheng.

Mo Bai had wanted to chat and gossip for a bit longer, but his own fans were already starting to encircle and stare at him.

As a guest performer, his purpose there was to attract fans, after all. Between him and this Toupai DaRen who had opened for the event, yes, their fan numbers were equally matched, but the latter was not showing his face, eh.

Unlike him...

Mo Bai looked at Gu Sheng and whispered to her with a grin, "Golden Master DaRen, I need to go back to the event now. See ya later." In front of this big name cosplayer, Gu Sheng really did not know how to handle his teasing. However, he was already waving to Toupai, and, bringing his cool, dignified appearance with him, he returned to the autograph and souvenir booth beside the exhibition area.

After the opening program came to an end, the crowd finally began to disperse, and people began moving toward the autograph and souvenir area where Mo Bai and another cosplayer, Mu Mu were. Mo Qingcheng was interested in their booth as well and led Gu Sheng in that direction. He looked over the souvenir booth for a while before suddenly asking, "Would you like to buy some souvenirs?"

So nonchalant...

Gu Sheng honestly wanted to act nonchalant too, but she was hot from head to toe with embarrassment. She did not even dare look at Toupai's eyes right now. She was not sure how but she somehow managed to give a little "mm-hmm" in reply. But only after her "mm-hmm" did she think about what had just happened. What question did she just answer? ... Buy some souvenirs? Buy souvenirs... Buy... Toupai was going to use his money to buy a souvenir for her?

Toupai had already reached into his pants pocket and pulled out a black wallet.

Gu Sheng hastily shook her head. "Uh, no, it's okay, thanks. I'm actually just a casual fan of 'The Legend of Qin.'" She saw Toupai start to pull out some bills... "You really don't need to... I can buy it myself." She pulled her backpack off, but even as she was unzipping the bag open, Toupai was already pointing at the cups at the back of the booth and asking the staff member, "Does this cup come in a set?"

"A set?" The worker was a young girl. She looked up at Mo Qingcheng, her eyes sparkling and her voice gentle as she asked this extremely handsome fellow, "Do you mean a matching, couple's version?"

He replied with an "mm-hmm."

"Yup." The girl was very enthusiastically helpful as she looked toward Gu Sheng, who was standing behind Toupai and whose train of thought was three steps behind his. "Which character does your girlfriend like? I'll help you guys find a couple's set..."

Toupai looked back at her. "Which character do you like?"

"..... Shao Siming."

"Shao Siming, eh?" The girl immediately laughed. "All girls seem to like her. Lots of people like to cosplay Shao Siming, too." She quickly knelt down and pulled out a pair of ceramic cups. "You guys can even go over there and get Mo Bai and Mu Mu to sign them."

The girl expertly packaged up the cups and passed them to Toupai.

While she was taking his payment, she could not help looking the two of them over curiously. “You two aren’t cosplayers, are you?” When she was asking this, she was also wracking her brain, trying to remember if Toupai and Gu Sheng – two such good-looking faces – were actually some well-known cosplayers who were here without their cosplay make-up to support their friend, Mo Bai...

Toupai gave an aloof smile but did not utter another sound.

The knowledgeable Qiang Qing Ci fans all shared a common understanding: Qiang Qing Ci was someone who did not really like talking to people he did not know. All these years, he had kept a low profile, and besides with people he had worked with for several years, he basically would not go out and participate in any sort of meet-up events. As a result, the only people surrounding him in his life from the voice-acting circle were the few from Wanmei.

Hmm.... In truth, he simply did not like to deal with people he did not know.

The staff member very keenly pulled out a paper bag and wanted to wrap up the cups in paper but was stopped by Mo Qingcheng. In a smooth gesture, he pointed in Mo Bai’s direction. “Don’t worry about it. We still want to get them signed.”

He seemed very interested in getting his buddy’s autograph. As soon as the cups were in hand, he led Gu Sheng over to the autographing area. At first, only Mo Bai saw them heading over, and he could not resist raising an eyebrow and letting out a snicker. Then, beside him, Mu Mu, who had just finished signing something, lifted his gaze. When he saw them, his normally paralyzed-like face actually showed some sort of expression on it.

Toupai handed the cups to them, and Mo Bai immediately took them. With a huge grin, he signed his name. Then, thinking briefly, he also drew a heart, all the while teasing, “An extra little something just for you, my bro.”

When he was finished, he handed the cup to the person beside him.

Deadpan face Mu Mu was still staring at the two of them. His reaction still half a step behind, he finally managed to say something: “Oh my god.”

behind, he finally managed to say something: “Oh my god.”

Mu Mu was wearing a silver wig, and as he lowered his head, the hair slid down along his neckline. He gazed silently at the cups for some time before lifting his head again and looking at Toupai with a serious expression. “What do you want me to write? ‘Wishing you forever happiness and harmony[1]’?.....”

.....

.....

“Knock it off,” Mo Bai immediately chortled. “You should write, ‘Hope you have a baby soon[2],’ of course.”

.....

.....

Mu Mu gave an “oh” and then pulled the cap off his pen, truly intending to follow the suggestion. Gu Sheng sincerely felt that she was going to cry from all this teasing. She stretched out her hand and tugged at Toupai’s sleeve, pleading to him with her eyes for help.

He cast a comforting glance at her and then spoke up to put a stop to the two men’s banter. “That’s enough. A joke should only be taken so far.”

Mo Bai let out a “pfft” of repressed laughter, completely amused by this.

Mu Mu, however, continued to speak just as frankly as before. “You’ve brought the actual person here with you already, but yet you’re not letting us say anything...” His head was lowered as he wordlessly wrote his name and also wordlessly copied Mo Bai by drawing a heart.

And so, just like that, their two cups now ended up looking ridiculously couple-y.

The staff members beside them only thought that Mo Qingcheng and Gu Sheng were good friends of these two cosplayers and had absolutely

no idea that this man was the big, respected name in the voice acting world who had provided the opening monologue. These two old buddies of Mo Qingcheng, one of them was skilled in poking fun and teasing while the other was just naturally dull and would speak only the blunt truth, and now, as they played off one another, Gu Sheng felt that even her palms had started to sweat.

She and Toupai...

She and Toupai...

Gu Sheng silently took and placed into her backpack the cup that Toupai had put into a box and handed to her. Questions were flying around in her mind. She and Toupai ... On this special occasion that was universally celebrated, they had gone out together, and now, were they really going to make the big step and move their relationship in “that” direction? As her thoughts turned to “that” direction, she felt her heart start to beat faster ...

Mo Bai and Mu Mu were, after all, guest performers there and did not have much free time for idle chatter. Soon, they headed onstage and started their performance. Hugging her jacket to herself, Gu Sheng stood with Toupai and watched the performance for a little while. He had also taken off his jacket and draped it over one of his arms as he stood quietly to the side and watched.

Those eyes, dark and bright, were fixed on the stage. So gorgeous.

Gu Sheng’s mind was still preoccupied with thinking about “that” direction, and she honestly could not say what she was watching...

Not much time had passed, though, when Mo Qingcheng had to take a phone call. Although he did not say much and Gu Sheng also tried her best to not listen in on his private conversation, she could still guess that it was work-related.

Sure enough, after he hung up, Toupai told her in a low tone, “I might need to leave. Something just came up.”

“Alright. No problem.” Gu Sheng nodded understandingly.

The two of them very quickly left the exhibition centre and walked to the entrance of the community compound where they had parked their vehicle. Following alongside the green belt of the compound, they passed two buildings and strolled toward the parking area. All the while, Gu Sheng was deliberating whether she should tell him not to take her back to school so that he would not need to hold up his work. Unexpectedly, they heard someone call out from behind them, “Cheng Cheng.”

Mo Qingcheng quickly halted his steps. Gu Sheng also followed suit and stopped.

And then, she again followed suit and turned around to look at the middle-aged man behind them who had a stern expression on his face ... The quality of this man’s voice was very similar to Mo Qingcheng’s ... except that it was quite a bit more mature-sounding ...

While Gu Sheng was still speculating, the middle-aged man had already smilingly cast a glance at Gu Sheng. “This is...?”

“Gu Sheng.” Mo Qingcheng stood next to her and very simply stated her name.

Not knowing what to say, Gu Sheng only woodenly nodded and said, “Hello uncle.”

“Is this your girlfriend?” the middle-aged man asked with a smile.

The outer corners of Mo Qingcheng’s eyes turned upward in an obvious smile. His voice was so very real beside her, light, yet certain as he responded to the question. “Mm. My girlfriend.”

\*

[1] 百年好合 “bai nian hao he.” This is a blessing normally wished upon a couple at their wedding. Literally, it means “harmony until the end of one’s lives,” and is wishing the couple a harmonious and happy marriage for the rest of their life, until they are a ripe old age.

[2] 早生贵子 “zao sheng gui zi.” This is a blessing usually given to a newlywed couple. Literally, it means, “give birth to a son soon.”

## Chapter 27: Spicy Crispy Skin Fish (5)

Oh god...

A buzzing sound went off in her mind, and then, it went entirely blank.

She could sense the middle-aged man's eyes on her had instantly become much more kindly and amiable. He seemed to say something along the lines that it had been quite some days since he had seen Mo Qingcheng's parents, that even a little gathering of family was difficult to arrange with them... What did Mo Qingcheng say? Something like, they were both out of town doing surgeries...

Gu Sheng felt as if she were floating. She was completely stupefied.

Gu Sheng, wake up, you! Wake up!

Hurry and wake up!

"Cheng Cheng's parents are usually very busy. If you have time in the future, come to Little Uncle's house for dinner, alright?" This sentence successfully pulled her out from one void and then kicked her into another void... Gu Sheng's response was completely by automatic reflex when she gave a very well-mannered and likable smile.

Little Uncle turned around and left.

"I need to go to the hospital," she heard Mo Qingcheng tell her. "Should I drop you off in front of the grocery store?"

Gu Sheng felt she would not be able to hold up for much longer. She was utterly unable to talk to Toupai one-on-one right now ... Her eyes drifted here and drifted there but just dared not look at him.

He chuckled, "Let's go. I'm in a bit of a hurry."

The red in her cheeks deepened another few shades.

She swore, she had never had a boyfriend before, but she had read romance novels and watched idol dramas... None of them had ever said what she should do if suddenly someone called her his girlfriend... Especially when that someone was Toupai, what should she do? ...



“Sheng Sheng?” His voice was a little low as it coaxed her out of her trance.

“Huh?” She answered, “Um, well, let’s go then.”

With head lowered, she followed his footsteps and waited for him to unlock the car before pulling open the door and sitting down in the passenger seat. During this whole process, she behaved as if Mo Qingcheng was thin air. Or rather, she acted completely as if she herself was thin air ... All she wanted was to hurry up and get to the grocery store. However, even though she was looking straight ahead at the sights outside of the front windshield, her peripheral vision was still able to see his hand move to adjust the vents and then casually drape itself over the steering wheel.

The car drove out of the community compound and out onto the main road.

So many cars out on Valentine’s Day ...

Gu Sheng tried hard to focus on the sea of vehicles in front of them.

Could she pretend that, just now ... she hadn’t heard anything? ...

“Are you hot? Do you need to take off your down jacket?” he asked her.

The voice he was using was like the one that night, when he had sung “Song Has Not Ended” to her – low, even, and captivating.

She wanted to act composed, to carry herself with ease and poise. She wanted to seriously reflect on this suddenly messy and confusing relationship between her and Toupai, where, the more she thought about it, the more of a mess it seemed... but she could not be disloyal to her own ears.

This voice was the one she loved.

The voice she loved...

Wordlessly, she shed her jacket, placed it in her lap, and hugged it to herself.

This voice that she loved had basically broken all of her “firsts”: her

first time giving all her contact details to someone she knew in the 2-D world; her first time meeting up with someone from the 2-D world; her first time having dinner with a boy who was neither a relative nor a classmate; and... her first time going out with a boy on Valentine's Day... and then being called his girlfriend. T.T

So...

Were she and Toupai really... honestly... boyfriend... and girlfriend... now? T.T

Why was her mind completely blank, like some sort of natural disaster had happened?! Just thinking about the words, "boyfriend and girlfriend" caused her heart to start pounding rapidly, and she immediately tried to block the idea from her brain. She did not dare let herself think about those words anymore.

The exhibition centre was very close to the hospital, and soon, the car was stopped across from Gu Sheng's family's grocery store. When Gu Sheng saw the store, it was as if she had seen a lifeboat, and finally she had the courage to say something.

"I'm going now," she said quietly.

"I'll try to finish up as soon as possible. Want to have dinner together?"

"Huh? No, that's okay." Gu Sheng's blurted out her decline as she stared at him in shock. But as she looked at those beautiful eyes, her boldness immediately weakened. "I need to go home for dinner tonight. Another day, maybe? ..."

He answered with an "mm."

He answered with an "mm." From the backseat, he grabbed her schoolbag and handed it to her. "Be careful when crossing the road."

"Mm."

"Call you later tonight?"

"Mm."

Gu Sheng took her bag from him and reached to open the door for her

escape.

Mo Qingcheng, however, unexpectedly grabbed her arm. She turned to look at him, her expression dazed and bewildered. "Put on your jacket first and put your bag on your back before you get out of the car." When he finished saying this, he could not hold back a laugh.

.....

.....

Gu Sheng felt her face was hot enough to fry an egg on it. Under Toupai's attentive gaze, she obediently put on her jacket and backpack. And then... she glanced at him. Not seeing any further objections, she finally opened the door and stepped out of the car. It seemed the person in the car intended to watch her cross the road before he would leave.

Gu Sheng instantly felt as if she was at least five years younger, like she was sixteen or seventeen years old. She nearly did not know how to work her hands and feet.

Luckily, oh luckily, her road crossing went smoothly, and she entered the grocery store.

Cousin was standing behind the checkout counter helping someone who was paying. After handing the change back to the customer, he looked her over with a serious eye. "Just celebrated Valentine's Day? Didn't you say you weren't coming home this week? How come you're back?"

.....

How was she supposed to know? ...

Her plan had been to go back to school, but then Toupai said he was going to drop her off at the grocery store so she obediently came back here with him. T.T

Today could be considered a big holiday, and there was an especially large number of customers in the store. Cousin did not have any spare time to poke fun at her anymore. Gu Sheng wandered alone to the cooler

and pulled out a can of cola. With a crack, she pulled open the tab on the can and took a drink. Still dissatisfied, she swigged down another few mouthfuls.

Girlfriend...

Boyfriend...

She and Toupai?

How in the world did they turn into boyfriend-girlfriend?...

Really?

No way?

She downed a few more mouthfuls of cola. Suddenly, she felt a pair of eyes on her.

She tilted her head to the side and saw Dong Yiru standing beside her, eyes bright and unblinking as they stared at her...

“What’s up? ... Do you want to ask for a day off? Or...” Gu Sheng felt as if her hairs were standing on end, and goosebumps were popping up because of her gaze.

Dong Yiru continued to look fixedly at her. “Sheng Sheng Man? Sheng Sheng Man!”

Her mouthful of cola nearly came spewing out. Choking on it, she covered her mouth and started coughing furiously. Dong Yiru immediately took the can of cola from her but still continued to stare at her like she was a space alien. Gu Sheng was coughing so hard her eyes were watering. Finally managing to catch her breath, with red eyes, she lifted her head, wanting to ask if she had heard wrong. But then, she heard the girl in front of her carry on to say, “How did I not hear it? Ever since I found out you and my idol were dating, I honestly listened to all of the recordings of your voice taken from various birthday celebrations and singing events. How did I not recognize that you were the same person? This is so amazing. So amazing!”

Dong Yiru was so excited she was near incoherent.

Gu Sheng felt she would soon not be able to keep herself together...

“I’m not...”

“You definitely are!”

“I’m honestly not...”

“I can’t be wrong. I’m positive it’s you. Absolutely certain it’s you! It’s completely identical.”

“.....”

Dong Yiru promised in a firm tone, “Don’t worry. I won’t tell anyone at all!”

Admitting utter defeat, Gu Sheng asked, “How did you know I’m... Sheng Sheng Man?”

She honestly just wanted to dig a hole and bury herself in it...

“Because fate was on my side.” Dong Yiru pulled out her mobile phone from her pocket. In an extremely furtive manner, she showed her a Weibo tweet. “Mo Bai just posted something, and then several dadas instantly re-tweeted it. And then, right after, Mo Bai deleted his post.... Deleted within seconds, aaah! But I still managed to see it!”

The tweet she was showing Gu Sheng was from Mo Bai’s Weibo.

Sure enough, it had been deleted already. But before he removed the post, Mo Bai had first re-posted and written: My bad. I’ll delete. =o =

Gu Sheng had a very, very bad feeling.

Ever since she discovered that Gu Sheng was Sheng Sheng Man, Dong Yiru suddenly had a sense of pride stemming from “my idol’s wife and I are bosom sisters” and was a hundred times friendlier to her. “Sheng Sheng, you can put your mind at ease. I will not tell anyone who you are. I swear! It will be kept a secret! Oh god, you don’t know how excited I got when I first recognized that it was you!” Dong Yiru could not help placing her hand on her chest. “I know Toupai’s golden master. I’m so emotional right now I could cry...”

“What did he post?”

Gu Sheng felt she was about to cry too T.T.....

“It was a photo taken of your backs. He originally did not say anything about the photo, but once deadpan face Mu re-tweeted it, everyone understood what it was.”

.....

.....

Dong Yiru completely failed to notice Gu Sheng’s frozen expression. She pulled up Mu Mu’s Weibo page, and in front of the post that he had re-tweeted that now said, “The original Weibo post has been deleted,” he had added a single sentence: Hey, isn’t that Toupai and his wife?

## Chapter 28: Spicy Crispy Skin Fish (6)

Dong Yiru was still in a state of exhilaration and was even scrolling through the comments for her to see. They all said the same thing, all along the lines of “My heart has shattered.” Below Mu Mu’s Weibo repost, there was no lack of people within the entertainment circle excitedly wanting the inside gossip on what the female subject of the photograph looked like from a frontal view. Mu Mu was especially serious when he replied to a yellow-V Weibo-er who was a closer friend: Pretty. The type I like.

And then below that was another string of comments in the vein of “Is this a hint that someone wants to steal someone else’s girl ( ◡ ◡ )? ! ”

The line-up of comments was very orderly and under control...

.....

.....

“You know, Mu Mu is my absolute cosplayer idol. If I were not paying attention to him all the time, I would definitely have missed this. Don’t worry. It really was deleted almost instantly... Probably no one got a chance to save the photo...” Dong Yiru was still going on and on with her blah blah blah...

Gu Sheng was at a loss for words.

I need to calm down. Calm down...

That was all she could think.

She could not stay in the grocery store any longer. Fortunately, Dong Yiru was still in the middle of her work shift and did not dare talk too much with her. Gu Sheng found an excuse and ran out of there all the way home. Once she stepped in through the doorway, she saw her mother washing dishes in the kitchen. Hearing the sound of the front door, her mom turned to take a quick backwards glance. “Why are you suddenly back? Didn’t you say you weren’t coming home this week? I didn’t leave any dinner for you.”

“Mm ... I went to a schoolmate’s house. It’s close to here. I came back since it was on the way.”

Mom did not say any more and simply pointed at the refrigerator. “Your dad and I are on duty to take care of your [maternal] grandma through the night. If you’re hungry, there are buns in the fridge. Get some to eat yourself.”

She answered with an “mm.”

It was good there would be no one at home, definitely good. Otherwise, if she was acting abnormal the whole night, she was sure her dad and mom would interrogate her.

She wandered back into her room and felt her own face. Burning up, so burning up. She could completely imagine how red it was. She had been teased in so many ways and so fiercely today that in retrospect, she rather admired herself for even being able to last all the way back home. T.T

Toupai...

Qiang Qing Ci...

Mo Qingcheng...

These three names combined together made up one person. And this particular person was the voice she had liked from the time she had first stepped into the entertainment circle. Back then, she did not know he could sing. Her only thought at the time was that one day, she would compose, arrange, and write the lyrics and dialogue for a storyline song, and if Toupai could deliver one or two spoken lines in it, she would feel complete.

Complete.

At that time, her thinking was so simple...

She changed into her pajamas and sat out on the little balcony of her room. Her hands unconsciously rested on her guzheng. Her heart was still beating irregularly, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly...

She and Toupai... How had they evolved into this sort of relationship? ...



Was Toupai being serious, or was this just more of the teasing that was normal in the 2-D world and he just could not be bothered to clarify?

She recalled how, occasionally, a big name in the entertainment circle had hinted that she was interested in Toupai and some romance rumors had then followed-suit, but those rumors also died out very quickly. Mo Qingcheng genuinely was not someone who liked to publicly clarify or declare his opinion on anything. On the contrary, he somewhat gave the sense that he was actually dissociated from the 2-D world. With the exception of this time...

She touched her hand to her face again...

Still so hot. T.T

Was this an indication that her mind was going to spend the night drifting around in space somewhere?...

Without thinking, she plucked a note on her guzheng. A “twang” rang out. All of a sudden, something buried in her mind was prodded out. “Shang Ye”... Today was Valentine’s Day. Toupai said he was going to post “Shang Ye” on Valentine’s Day?! Oh no, oh no! The wave after wave of comments that were going to come were just too scary. She had not figured out what she was supposed to do... But if she continued being high profile like this, she really was going to go utterly insane.

She took a deep breath, then got up from the balcony and went back to her own bed. Lying there on her stomach, she stared at her mobile phone. Given the choice between either dialing the phone number or sending a WeChat message, she decisively went with the latter option... Keeping it to that form of communication seemed to at least allow her to maintain her composure a bit more.

She thought for a moment, then decided on typing the message: Still busy?

Very quickly, a voice message was returned from the other end.

Mo Qingcheng’s voice could be heard clearly: “Wait a sec. I just finished showering. Let me put on some clothes.”

.....

.....

Her brain very successfully helped her conjure up an image. The next second, she was burying her face furiously into her pillow. Too, too much allowed for the imagination...

Soon, she heard her phone ring, and it was not a WeChat alert. It was an incoming phone call. Gu Sheng turned her head to the side and looked at her phone. Mo Qingcheng's name showed up on the screen. He had actually, truly called her. Not WeChat. A phone call... Gu Sheng hesitated for a dozen seconds or so before she finally answered.

tumblr\_m4qqomreV91rv8v4go1\_500

"Have you eaten dinner yet?" This was the first sentence Toupai said to her in his first phone call to her.

"Not yet..." Gu Sheng answered unthinkingly.

"I'm still at the hospital. Want to have dinner together?"

.....

.....

Oh god, who could give her a few pounds of courage so she could refuse Toupai for the second time in a day?

In that tranquil atmosphere of her room, she could even hear the steady sound of Mo Qingcheng's breathing coming from her phone... She very despicably chose to ignore his question and asked about the priority that was on her mind instead. "I wanted to talk to you... because, actually, I wanted to talk about that song we recorded..."

His voice was gentle. Immediately, he understood what she was talking about. "Shang Ye?"

"Mm-hmm... Shang Ye."

"What about it?"

"I wanted to ask, that song... could we... post it on an ordinary date

instead?” As a singer, she could not bear to not release a song that she had put so much heart into recording. But if they were to post it on this particular day, she did not know if she would ever dare go online again.  
T.T

“Mm. Sure.”

.....

.....

That simple?

So... simple.

Gu Sheng was relieved.

“But we might need to change it to a different song, then,” Mo Qingcheng said with a little chuckle, “because they all know that I’m going to post something today as a gift for all of them.”

She knew, of course, the “them” he was talking about was his fans.

Right. He had promised already... so he could not go back on his word and not upload a song. Gu Sheng also felt that would be inappropriate, but... if that song was released today, she truly felt she would not be able to keep it together. Seriously, she honestly, honestly would not be able to keep it together.

“How about this? Tonight, let’s collaborate again on a new song.” Mo Qingcheng very considerately offered her another suggestion. “Do you have a song arrangement that is ready to go? Send it to me and I’ll sing it, how about that?”

“..... Okay.”

It seemed that was the only option.

Toupai was not a singer. If he was, his computer would have to have some stock songs ready, right? And he would not be caught in a bind where he wanted to change songs last minute but had nothing he could use.

“I think, in my computer... the newest one I have is ‘Jinli Chao’ [Legend of the Koi].” She was a little embarrassed to tell him this. After all, right now, the whole country was making covers of this song, and having Toupai sing it seemed... not special enough.

“Nice. We will stir-fry koi tonight[1].” His voice seemed to resonate slightly, and he did not mind at all. “You do the harmony?”

“..... Okay.”

She gave in and agreed. Getting up off her bed, she started to look for her new arrangement of “Legend of the Koi.” Actually, it was precisely because the whole country was making covers of this song that she had decided to also have some fun and had made an arrangement with her guzheng playing the main melody. Harmonizing... She had only tried it once or twice. As she thought about harmonizing with Mo Qingcheng, she still felt tremendous pressure weighing down upon her.

It was half an hour of hard work before she finally completed the background music.

Even when she had sent it over, she still felt uneasy...

Until...

He sent over a WeChat message: “I posted it. You can go have a listen.”

That fast?

Did he do it in a single take?!

.....

He truly was Toupai [number one, lead attraction], indeed.

She opened up Toupai’s Weibo. Since he was still at the hospital, after he received the background music, he could only use the Changba[2] app to record the song and then directly upload it from there. Hence, it was a very simple, clean Weibo tweet. There was no additional explanation and no one was @ either.

Gu Sheng breathed out in relief. The harmonies... People should not be able to tell it was her, right?

That would be the best situation. T.T

Only three minutes had passed, and the Weibo post had been re-tweeted more than a thousand times.

She suddenly did not dare click on the link to listen to the song. But deep inside, she still very much wanted to immediately have a listen of Toupai's version of "Legend of the Koi"..... In the end, she finally mustered up her courage and opened up the link.

[[<https://youtu.be/oEBI3vUaWzQ>]]

While she was still inhaling a deep breath, she could already hear the musical introduction that she had played on her guzheng.

This song's introduction was relatively long...

And it was with that guzheng music playing in the background that she very clearly heard Toupai use his unique, low voice to gently introduce the song: "This song is a gift from me and her to all of you. Happy Valentine's Day."

\*

[1] Toupai is playing on words and similar sounds. He said 炒锦鲤 "chao jinli", where this "chao" means to stir-fry and "jinli" is the koi fish. The title of the song is 锦鲤抄 "Jinli Chao." In this case, the "chao" is a different character and is actually a Japanese literary style.

[2]唱吧. A free social networking app that acts almost like a mobile karaoke machine. During singing, it will automatically record and add in built-in effects such as reverb and echo. It can then directly upload onto other social networking sites such as Weibo or QQ. Changba.com

\*

Additional Comments:

Any of you fill in images in your mind of an unclothed Toupai just out of the shower? ;)

No kidding when it was said the whole country was doing covers of this song, 锦鲤抄 "Jinli Chao" [Legend of the Koi]. If you search for the

Chinese name in Youtube, you get tons of different versions.. Now imagine Chinese sites. The version I linked is a cover sung by 小曲儿, the singer of Shang Ye and my favourite singer. There are several good versions out there, most of them duets since this song was written as a duet of two female voices. Unfortunately, I couldn't find a male-female duet, so you'll have to imagine Sheng Sheng's harmonies.

I thought the tune was catchy when I first listened to it but didn't get the hype... until I seriously paid attention to the lyrics. The love story is touching...

文案：

宁武皇仁光九年锦文轩刻本《异闻录》载：

扶桑画师浅溪，居泰安，喜绘鲤。院前一方荷塘，锦鲤游曳，溪常与嬉戏。

其时正武德之乱，潘镇割据，战事频仍，魑魅魍魉，肆逆于道。兵戈逼泰安，街邻皆逃亡，独溪不舍锦鲤，未去。

是夜，院室倏火。有人入火护溪，言其本鲤中妖，欲取溪命，却生情愫，遂不忍为之。翌日天明，火势渐歇，人已不见。

溪始觉如梦，奔塘边，但见池水干涸，莲叶皆枯，塘中鲤亦不知所踪。

自始至终，未辨眉目，只记襟上层迭莲华，其色魅惑，似血着泪。

后有青岩居士闻之，叹曰：魑崇动情，必作灰飞。犹蛾之投火耳，非愚，乃命数也。

Background:

In the ninth year of the reign of Ningwu Emperor, Ren Guang, the carved scroll of "Records of Strange Tales" recorded this:

The Fusang[a] artist, Qian Qi, who lived in Tai'an, loved to paint koi. In one area of his front courtyard was a lotus pond. Inside, a koi swam around, and Qi would often play with it.

At this time, the Wude Uprising occurred. The town of Panzhen separated and became independent, fighting broke out, and all sorts of vile and wicked people arose in rebellion. War closed in on Tai'an. All neighbours fled, with the exception of Qi, who did not want to part with

his koi.

That night, a fire broke out in his home. Someone entered the fiery scene to protect Qi and said to him that she was a koi demon who originally intended to kill Qi but developed feelings for him and could not bear to carry through with her plan. By the next morning, the fire had slowly died out, but the girl was gone.

Qi thought that it had been like a dream. He ran to the pond but discovered the water had dried up, the lotus leaves had all withered, and the koi inside was missing.

From beginning to end, he had not clearly seen her face. All he could remember was the beautiful lotuses on the bosom of her gown. Their color was entrancing, like tears of blood.

Later, when Qing Yan Ju Shi ['ju shi' is probably a taoist or buddhist with great knowledge and abilities] heard his recount, he sighed and said, "When demons and spirits fall in love, their souls have no choice but to turn to scattered dust. Like a moth that cannot help throwing itself at a fire, it is not foolishness but rather, destiny."

[O:33] 蝉声陪伴着行云流浪

The sounds of cicadas accompany the drifting clouds

回忆开始后安静遥望远方

As memories start to flood over me, I stare quietly off into the distance

荒草覆没的古井枯塘

The old well and dried pond overgrown with weeds

匀散一缕过往

Emit a hint of the past

[O:49] 晨曦惊扰了陌上新桑

The rays of dawn disturb the new mulberry tree that has grown on the path in the fields

风卷起庭前落花穿过回廊

The breeze swirls the fallen blossoms through the winding corridor

浓墨追逐着情绪流淌

The ink follows my emotions as it flows off the brush

染我素衣白裳

And stains my white garments

[1:07] 阳光微凉 琴弦微凉 风声疏狂 人间仓皇

The sunshine is cool. The strings of the qin are cool. The wind blows fiercely. This mortal world is in a flurry.

呼吸微凉 心事微凉 流年匆忙 对错何妨

My breath is cool. The worries of my heart are cool. Time is hurrying by. Why be concerned with right and wrong?

[1:24] 你在尘世中辗转了千百年

You wandered this mortal world for hundreds and thousands of years

却只让我看你最后一眼

Yet you only let me see you in that one final farewell

火光描摹容颜燃尽了时间

As the light of the fire traced out your features and then burned itself out

别留我一人 孑然一身 凋零在梦境里面

Please don't leave me by myself, alone in this world, to fade away inside a dream

(interlude)

[2:01] 萤火虫愿将夏夜遗忘

Fireflies are willing to forget summer nights

如果终究要挥别这段时光

If truly, it's time that I ought to say farewell to this period of my past

裙袂不经意沾了荷香



My sleeves were accidentally stained with the fragrance of the water  
lotus flower

从此坠入尘网

And from then, I fell into the entrapments of this mortal world

[2:18] 屐齿轻踩着烛焰摇晃

My shoes tread lightly and unsteadily on the candle flame's shadow

所有喧嚣沉默都描在画上

All forms of noise, all forms of silence have been traced into the  
painting

从惊蛰一路走到霜降

I continue my journey, from when the insects awake in spring all the  
way until the first frost descends

泪水凝成诗行

My tears join together, like lines of poetry

[2:35] 灯花微凉 笔锋微凉 难绘虚妄 难解惆怅

The burnt candlewick is cool. The tip of the writing brush is cool. So  
difficult to paint what is imaginary. So difficult to dispel melancholy.

梦境微凉 情节微凉 迷离幻象 重叠忧伤

The scenes in my dreams are cool. The plots in them are cool. Those  
blurry illusions only cause grief upon grief.

[2:52] 原来诀别是因为深藏眷恋

It turns out our farewell was because of a deeply hidden love

你用轮回换我枕边月圆

You used your reincarnation as an exchange for me to rest with  
moonlight on my pillow

我愿记忆停止在枯瘦指尖

I wish my memories would stop at my gaunt fingertips

随繁花褪色 尘埃散落 渐渐地渐渐搁浅

And fade away, like the colors of the formerly flourishing blossoms. The dust has settled. And gradually, so gradually, they will come to a halt.

[3:14] 多年之后 我又梦到那天

Many years later, I dreamed again of that day

画面遥远 恍惚细雨绵绵

That image seemed so distant, like looking through a continuous drizzle of rain

[3:30] 如果来生太远寄不到诺言

If the next life seems too remote that one cannot entrust a promise to it  
不如学着放下许多执念

It would be better to let go of all those things that have been held stubbornly in the heart

以这断句残篇向岁月吊唁

Use those fragments of verse and poetry as a way to mourn the passing of years

老去的当年 水色天边 有谁将悲欢收殓

Yesteryear's scenes have grown old. Who can bury those old sorrows and joys?

[3:50] 蝉声陪伴着行云流浪

The sounds of cicadas accompany the drifting clouds

回忆的远方

To those distant memories

[a] 扶桑. In mythology, Fusang was the name of a mystic island east of China, but then became interpreted as current day Japan.

## Chapter 29: Spicy Crispy Skin Fish (7)

Me and her...

Me and her...

.....

Completely because of his introductory words, she simply could not focus enough to listen to how Toupai's singing sounded or whether her harmonizing was perfect ... Luckily, oh luckily, this time, Toupai had turned off comments for the post.

With her face turned to the side, she lay on her stomach on her bed and listened to the song another time.

Probably because she had been teased too much this whole day already... she surprisingly had lost that initial embarrassment, and now, all she felt was a somewhat subtle, but remarkable feeling.

She stared at her mobile phone, and then, as if prodded by some unknown hand, she unthinkingly opened up the comments.

The number of re-tweets was still increasing by the second, but only friends could leave comments, and in particular, the ones doing so were those who had listened in as they recorded in the studio that day. From Feng Ya Song and Dou Dou Dou Bing to Wwwwk and Fei Shao, they were all leaving messages of disdain: Hey, where's the "Shang Ye" we had agreed on?

All except one very strange message that was very eye-catching.

It, surprisingly, was left by a singer who had gone into seclusion for a long time now – Ling Long Ti Tou: Huh? That voice doing the harmony, is that Sheng Sheng Man?

This goddess, who in the hearts of many ancient-style fans was the number one mature and powerful female voice, actually recognized her voice? Gu Sheng was a little shocked by this, but after remembering all the gossip and rumors of the last month... Well, anyone could guess who that was in the recording. While she was still trying to find a suitable

reason, someone had already replied to Ling Long Ti Tou: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm, it's Sheng Sheng. But hey, Little Cage[1], you don't ever go on Weibo. How did you find out about our females star of this last month's gossip?

Ling Long Ti Tou: Mm. Actually... I've known about her for a long time now.

And then...

There was no more dialogue.

Ling Long Ti Tou's comment made Gu Sheng feel somewhat uneasy. Ling Long Ti Tou had been in the ancient-style music circle for five or six years now, but Gu Sheng had only just entered the circle not long ago. In the beginning, it was only because a classmate had asked her to arrange a song that she had the opportunity to somewhat understand what the ancient-style music circle was all about. Because the previous couple of years had been so busy with schoolwork, she usually would just arrange music for songs others had composed and given to her, and only occasionally would she both compose and arrange ... But back then, she had not even registered for Weibo, so when the singer released the song, at most, her name would simply be listed next to "composed by" and "arranged by". It was only later, in her fourth year of undergraduate studies, when she had already been accepted straight into graduate studies, that she had the time and had decided to join a music association as a singer...

So... she had never been famous before. She had very comfortably stayed in her role as an unknown, happy to arrange music and sing some songs.

The 2-D world entertainment circles that were most commonly talked about were, in general, online voice acting, ancient-style music, artists and illustrators, writers, and cosplay. Most people who had spent some time in the 2-D world would end up crossing over into several of the circles. For example, Dou Dou Dou Bing was a celebrity in both the voice acting CV and ancient-style music circles while Ling Long Ti Tou was in both the artist/illustrator and ancient-style music circles... Unlike herself,

who stuck purely to doing ancient-style songs. That was why she very much admired people like Ling Long Ti Tou, who had many talents and abilities.

She seemed to recall...

When Toupai had asked her what line-up of singers she ideally wanted to cover a song, she had mentioned Ling Long Ti Tou.

She also seemed to recall...

At the time, Dou Dou Dou Bing had said that Ling Long Ti Tou seemed to... have special feelings for Toupai?

And every time she released a new song, she would @ Qiang Qing Ci...

Holding her mobile phone up above her, she flipped over on her bed and lay on her back, staring at the ceiling above her. She suddenly felt a subtle, peculiar feeling. A little bit of curiosity, a little bit of speculation, plus a little bit of... discomfort and unease. As she refreshed Toupai's Weibo again, she saw that Ling Long Ti Tou really had not left any more comments. Toupai had forbidden comments on this Weibo post from non-friends... so that meant she was one of Toupai's friends?

One was the commercial CV, Toupai; the other was an ancient-style singer who had long ago been elevated to goddess status...

Gu Sheng gazed at her phone. She felt that the more she thought on this, the more she was overthinking it, and so, she quickly exited out of his Weibo and exhaled lightly. Her stomach rumbled hungrily as she ran to the kitchen and made some oatmeal. Grabbing a shredded, dried pork bun with her, she headed back to her room where she saw a notification on her Weibo indicating a new private message.

She clicked it open.

It was... Ling Long Ti Tou: My apologies for being so bold as to contact you like this. I have recently been wanting to make an album. I was wondering if you have time to compose and arrange some songs for it?

Gu Sheng had just ripped open the plastic packaging of the bun when

she saw this and was instantly stunned.

An album to be released commercially? Compose and arrange songs?

Since when had she become so famous?.....

Or maybe... it was because of Toupai?

She randomly guessed at the reason as she took a bite of her bun.

Before she had a chance to reply, Ling Long Ti Tou added: 2500 yuan per song. That's the amount I offer to all composers and arrangers. Is that fair to you?

.....

.....

Gu Sheng placed her hands on her keyboard and typed rapidly: ^^ So happy that you would think so highly of me..... But I rarely compose. Usually I just do arrangements... I'm nervous I won't be experienced enough...

Ling Long Ti Tou: I have listened to all of your past songs. I really like them.

Gu Sheng: ..... How about this? Why don't you tell me what style you usually prefer, and I will think about it.....

T.T Why did she feel like she was being arrogant?

But, that was not the case. Every composer, arranger, lyricist, art designer, and person who did post-production wanted to work with a big-name singer. After all, to have one's own work sung by the finest singer would be so gratifying... However, she honestly was not good enough to the point that Ling Long Ti Tou would personally invite her to collaborate with her, especially on a commercial project...

Ling Long Ti Tou: "Ji Ye Cha" [Tea Under a Clearing Night Sky] and "Qian Qian" [Lush]. Have you heard them before?

Gu Sheng: Mm-hmm.

The other end fell silent.

Gu Sheng mulled over the proposal for a moment, contemplating whether she was capable of completing the task.

She had not finished this conversation yet when Geng Xiaoxing, who had disappeared for the entire day, suddenly sent over a private message: Officially requesting to chat.

Gu Sheng replied to Geng Xiaoxing: Wait a sec.

She switched back to the window with Ling Long Ti Tou's messages and wrote a reply to her: Would it be okay if I gave you an answer tomorrow?  
^^

Ling Long Ti Tou: Sure.

So, like that... her conversation with Ling Long Ti Tou came to an end.

And on the other side, Geng Xiaoxing had already sent over a question: In your opinion, if a girl and a boy have known each other for quite some time but the boy still has not asked to see the girl's picture or have a video chat or something ... does that mean he's not interested in the girl?  
...

Gu Sheng: ..... ㄋ ( ͡ ▽ ͜ ) ㄟ Why don't you just come out and say that Jue Mei Sha Yi still hasn't asked to have a video chat with you?...

Geng Xiaoxing: ..... Go to hell, you. Just answer the question.

Gu Sheng: I think... there's nothing unusual about that...

Geng Xiaoxing: Why? Nowadays, don't people exchange photos and have video chats right after they meet?...

Gu Sheng: You're talking about a circle of people who interact with their voices. No one really pays much attention to outward appearance.

Geng Xiaoxing: But what if the other party is really ugly looking? What do you do then?

Gu Sheng: Jue Mei DaRen is quite handsome... and you are nice-looking too...

Geng Xiaoxing: T.T I still think it's weird, ah.

Gu Sheng: It's just like writers and illustrators. When you like them, it has nothing to do with what they look like, right? ㄟ ( ▽ ) ㄟ For CVs and singers, they are voice lovers to start with, so as long as the other party's voice sounds right to them and that person's looks aren't so bad they would be an endangerment to society, then that's enough... It's not uncommon for people to be together for half a year or a year and to still haven't seen each other's photograph. To them, connecting by voice is enough. That's the world of a voice lover. ^^

Geng Xiaoxing: Oh, true..... Since I started liking listening to voices, I've felt there's no need to see the person's face. Actually... I'm just scared he won't like my face.

Gu Sheng teased her: Then go send a pic to him and ask, "My Lord, are you satisfied with your humble servant wife's face?"

Geng Xiaoxing sent back an emoticon vomiting blood.

Gu Sheng typed a smiley face and then very empathetically comforted her: The face is not important. What's important is, is his voice nice? Is he straight? And the most important... how's his personality and reputation? I can very certainly tell you, Jue Mei Sha Yi is very much a straight male, not the least bit bent, and his reputation in the entertainment circle is very good. So cupped fist Add oil. Go get 'em!

Geng Xiaoxing: T.T .....

Geng Xiaoxing seemed to have worked things out in her own mind and did not ask any more questions.

Gu Sheng continued to munch on her bun. She took a slurp of her oatmeal. So hot... She drank it down, one little mouthful at a time. Her thoughts drifted around, then came back to Ling Long Ti Tou's invitation to her to compose and arrange. Before she had thought too much about it, however, Toupai's phone call came in.

Ouch...

In her anxiousness, she had scalded her tongue with the hot oatmeal.

When Gu Sheng answered her phone, she was still taking deep intakes



of air, trying to lessen the pain on the tip of her tongue.

In her phone receiver, she heard Toupai first say hello. His voice was somewhat low. "Finished listening to it yet?"

"Mm. Just finished..."

"I forgot to ask you just now, it's so late, how come you still haven't eaten?"

She tilted her head to look up at the clock hanging on the wall. It was rather late. Eight o'clock already...

"My dad and mom aren't home today..... but they left me some buns to eat."

"You're eating already?"

"Mm-hmm," she answered honestly.

"I just finished up here." Mo Qingcheng gave a little laugh. "I had wanted to wait and have some good food with you as a compensation to myself for having to work overtime on Valentine's Day." His statement was simple, but yet it made her feel so guilty...

"Next time..." Her mind felt like it was floating as she listened to him speak. "Next time... I promise to have dinner with you."

"How about tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow?"

( ◡ ◡ ◡ ).....

Mo Qingcheng seemed to have taken a drink of water. He was contemplating as he told her, "I'll be going to the recording studio tomorrow afternoon, and then I'm having dinner with Feng Ya Song and the others after. Why don't we arrange a place and I'll pick you up?"

Feng Ya Song and the others?

That was not bad, then... At least it would not be just the two of them by themselves. But... the recording studio and her home were in completely opposite directions, and it was definitely out of the way for him to pick

her up. It was better for her to go herself to save time.

“Sure... Give me the address, and I’ll just take the bus there myself. It’ll be fine.” Gu Sheng reached over and felt for paper and a pen on her desk.

“Alright. It might be a little late when I’m leaving the studio anyway.”

Mo Qingcheng did not beat around the bush and told her the address.

She was writing it down when she abruptly stopped.

This was clearly... a home address...

Shouldn’t it be a restaurant?!

“This is my home address.” Mo Qingcheng had torn open some sort of food packaging and was starting to eat. His words were slightly muffled by food as he explained, “Jue Mei and I live together.”

Whenever he ate, he always spoke slowly, like a lazy cat licking his claws while gazing at you, and for some unexplainable reason, it made your heart feel flustered.

Wait. This was wrong...

That’s not the point here, k T.T, Sheng Sheng Man...

( ⊙ o ⊙ ).....

Tomorrow, she was going to his home... for dinner. That was the most important point out of the important points.

She seldom ever went to classmates’ homes, and when she visited relatives at their home, she would always feel awkward. And now, she was actually going to a guy’s... No, wait, it was TWO guys’ home? Gu Sheng tried to imagine what a boy’s room would look like, and immediately, the image that popped into her mind was Cousin’s room filled with all sorts of electronic and video gaming equipment...

Toupai’s... shouldn’t be like that, right?

There should be professional recording equipment... and... food?

Yogurt? Potato chips?

She was a little embarrassed with that thought. Suddenly, she felt that when Toupai was eating, regardless of whether it was in person or over the phone like right at this moment or through her headset like in the past, he was rather... cute... and a little... adorable.

covering face with hands Such a weird thought T.T.....

“So, we’re agreed?” Mo Qingcheng confirmed with her.

“Mm...” As she stared at that string of words that was an address, that string of words that was Toupai and Jue Mei Sha Yi’s home address, she had an even more subtly remarkable feel.

\*

[1] 小笼子 “Xiao Long Zi.” Literally means “little cage.” It is actually a play on Ling Long Ti Tou’s name, where the ‘long,’ which means cage, sounds like the ‘long’ in her name.

## Chapter 30: Spicy Crispy Skin Fish (8)

She and Toupai had arranged to meet at five o'clock.

Using the address he had given her, she found her way to the place. Right as she was about to give Toupai a call like they had discussed, it just so happened that one of the residents of the building was opening the metal security door from the inside. Gu Sheng mulled things over very briefly, put away her phone, and before the door had closed all the way, slipped inside.

Really... it was not a big deal if she went up herself. She was already downstairs, and asking someone to come down to escort her seemed a little pretentious T.T.

The elevator stopped at the twenty-fourth floor and Gu Sheng stepped out. She discovered the layout here was very well designed with only two individual apartments on this floor. Glancing at the apartment numbers, she found the correct door. She inhaled and then exhaled lightly, trying not to be nervous.

All of a sudden, there rang out a burst of laughter comprised of several persons' voices mixed together...

Nice! There really were a lot of people here today.

Immediately after she rang the doorbell, she heard someone call out, "Jue Mei, Jue Mei, hurry up and open the door." The sound of Jue Mei's grumbling could be indistinctly heard, and then suddenly, the door was opened. It was Jue Mei.

"So early?" Jue Mei Sha Yi motioned to her that there were slippers off to the side. "We're playing mahjong right now. Mo Qingcheng's in the kitchen making dinner. Make yourself at home, Sheng Sheng. I'm about to kick everyone's butts, so I won't entertain you."

Gu Sheng answered with an "mm," and then Jue Mei, in a very non host-like manner, had already dashed back to the balcony and sat down at the mahjong table.

After changing into a pair of slippers, Gu Sheng looked over and saw six or seven people, some immersed in the game, some spectators, surrounding the mahjong table. They all quickly greeted Gu Sheng before turning back to the game.

Everyone was treating her like an old friend and that instantly made her feel much more at ease.

But... while she was debating for a few seconds whether she should go watch them play mahjong or go to the kitchen, she saw a person stroll out from behind the frosted glass window of the kitchen.

Holding a fish in his right hand, Mo Qingcheng walked up beside the sliding door of the kitchen and said to her in greeting, "Why didn't you call me first?"

The sleeves of his shirt were rolled up above his elbows, both of his hands were dripping wet, and a blue apron was tied around his body. Every part of him was declaring to the world that Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen was cooking at this moment... Gu Sheng stared at him a little blankly and only after a while did she remember that he had said he liked to do his own cooking. "Someone happened to be opening the door when I arrived downstairs, so I just came straight up..."

"It's better this way anyway," Feng Ya Song jumped in in a rather quiet voice. He yawned, "Why so polite? Don't worry about those courtesies."

"Yeah. If you're all polite and courteous everyday, how are you going to spend the rest of your days together?" Wwwwk grabbed the remote control beside him and turned up the temperature on the thermostat slightly. "It's not like you're an outsider."

While everyone was poking fun at them, Dou Dou Dou Bing unexpectedly popped her head out from behind Toupai and prodded him on the shoulder. "Toupai DaRen, step aside, please." Toupai turned slightly to let her pass, and she stepped out holding a plate of bright red strawberries that had obviously just been washed. While munching on one, she sauntered up in front of Sheng Sheng, picked up a strawberry, and held it right up to her mouth. "It's really sweet."

Feeling awkward from all the teasing, Gu Sheng took advantage of this chance, bit into the strawberry, and then gave an “mm-hmm.”

It was very sweet.

Exceptionally, exceptionally sweet...

Dou Dou Dou Bing laughed, “Do you want to watch us play mahjong, or watch Toupai cook?”

“I’ll... go help him.”

Have her endure the incessant teasing? She definitely could not handle that... She might as well go to the kitchen and be with Toupai.

“Mm. Go ahead.” Dou Dou Dou Bing shrugged. “But he’s a chef and doesn’t need any help at all.”

Gu Sheng wordlessly placed her backpack on the couch in the living room. Sensing that Toupai was still standing at the kitchen entrance, she promptly rolled up her sleeves and walked over toward him. “I’ll come help you?”

He gazed at her for two seconds before suddenly chuckling, “No need.”

“How about washing veggies? Or cutting them? I do know how to do that.” She used her eyes to beg him for mercy, wanting to go with him into the kitchen so she would not have to go to the balcony where everyone’s gazes would be on her...

Mo Qingcheng looked at her for another two seconds before his eyes shifted to a corner in the living room where the refrigerator was. “Would you like a drink of water? I’m a little thirsty, too. Want to get an orange juice out of the fridge for us to share?”

“Okay.” She turned around, walked over to open the refrigerator, and pulled out a carton.

From behind her, she heard Feng Ya Song join in on the fun and pipe up, “Sheng Sheng, we’re thirsty too.”

“There are four cartons of orange juice in the fridge. Get them yourself.” Mo Qingcheng bluntly turned down his request, then turned around and

walked back into the kitchen. Gu Sheng resolutely chose not to hear anything and followed him into the kitchen.

The kitchen was very large, like it had been designed for a foodie.

All the equipment and appliances one could possibly need were there. The color scheme was white and a warm orange, and in the glow of the lights, it felt especially cheery and welcoming. She pulled two drinking glasses down from the rack, filled each of them up halfway with juice, and then took a sip from one first.

Cold and sweetly tart. Very soothing.

When she went to hand him his glass, she discovered that he was already standing at the sink, continuing his work on that fish. Meticulous and skillful... And the most important point was, he did not have a free hand to take the glass, ah...

But... he said... he was thirsty...

She wrestled with herself. Staring at the side profile of his face, she hesitated for a moment but finally picked up the glass and walked up to the sink. In a soft voice, she asked, "Want some orange juice?"

Just those few words were enough to make her flustered.

She was worried he would say he did not want any and turn down her offer but also nervous he would say he did want a drink. Then, she would have to...

Mo Qingcheng lifted his head at the sound of her voice, glanced at her, and then shifted his eyes to the glass. He answered with a simple "mm."

T.T.....

Holding the glass, she slowly leaned closer and touched it to his lips. Very carefully, she raised the bottom, allowing the orange juice to flow gently into his mouth.

She was breathing very slowly.....

She forced herself to focus her eyes only on the glass and not at the face that was only inches away from her.

Her hands felt as if there was no strength in them. She was going to drop the glass soon T.T.....

“I’m good. Thanks.”

He stopped drinking, and his lips left the glass.

“You’re welcome.”

Gu Sheng gripped the glass with both hands and placed it back on the marble counter.

Toupai was starting to clean the fish. He placed it onto a wooden cutting board, and every step from start to finish was done very smoothly. Gu Sheng felt she was completely useless there and very embarrassedly requested, “How about you assign me something to do?”

“You really want something to do?” Toupai gave a laugh, that last syllable faint and so entrancing.

“Mm-hmm.”

While he used his knife to score one side of the fish, he first ordered the people outside, “Jue Mei, go tidy and set-up the table. Going to start cooking now.”

Jue Mei answered him in affirmative.

“I’ll teach you how to cook, then.” Mo Qingcheng’s voice was speaking beside her, “This dish is relatively easy to make: spicy crispy skin fish.”

“Sure.”

“Just like this, score each side of the fish.” On the other side of the carp, he made slits, one after another, diagonally from top to bottom. The fish was evenly divided, yet the flesh still stayed attached to the bone. “Then, you mix together the egg and cornstarch that you had gotten ready ahead of time, add some salt, and spread this all evenly onto the entire fish.”

Still speaking, Mo Qingcheng picked up the bowl near his hand and began evenly brushing the mixture onto the fish.

His technique was extremely gentle and thorough.



This was the first time he was teaching her face-to-face instead of just using his voice like in the past... Such a beautiful voice, delectable food... and a gorgeous person standing right before her, teaching her. Gu Sheng felt, even if she really wanted to remember what he was telling her, there was not much of a chance.....

Especially because he was right beside her.

“Later, when we are actually ready to cook it, we will put the entire fish into the wok of frying oil. When it’s fried to a golden color, we can take it out and put it on the plate.” Mo Qingcheng set the fish off to the side, washed the cutting board, brought over the ink cap mushrooms and cauliflower he had prewashed, and began prepping for the next dish, all the while still describing the recipe for the fish. “Leave some oil in the wok and put some minced ginger and garlic into it. Stir-fry them to release the aroma and then add high soup, salt, sugar, soy sauce, and some store-bought chili sauce. Stir-fry until they’re evenly mixed and then pour it all on top of the fish with some scallions.”

“Mm.” She was not sure if she had committed all of this to memory.

“Memorized everything?”

“Um... nearly, I think.”

Toupai was already turning on the stove.

With a “poof,” flames were dancing around the burner.

“I’m a doctor. You knew that, right?” Mo Qingcheng unexpectedly changed the subject.

“Huh?” Gu Sheng’s mind was still thinking about fish, and she could not seem to keep up with him. “Yes...”

She could guess and piece together most of it anyways.

“My parents are both doctors as well.” He poured some oil into the wok and started to heat it up. “They are usually very busy, so we don’t have many opportunities to see each other. That’s why, when I was bored, I started voice acting.”

“Oh.” She was slowly starting to adjust to Toupai’s train of thought and was able to process what seemed like a self-introduction.

Why did she feel like she, Sheng Sheng Man [slow voice/sound], was always half a beat slower than Toupai when she was around him? ...

But... this was so magical.

Toupai, who to this day remained a mystery in the 2-D world, was right here before her, cooking and talking at the same time. And he was talking about those things she had once been curious and speculated about...

“I’m really not that complicated, a very simple person, actually.” He slid the fish into the wok, beginning the methodical process of frying it. The sizzle, sizzle sounds and also the sound of the range hood fan blended together to make everything here that much more real... Gu Sheng was watching him fry the fish while, at the same time, admiring how skillful his hands were.

Soon after, he shut off the burner.

The fish had been fried to a beautiful golden and placed on a plate made of white porcelain. “That’s it. A nice golden color means that it’s crispy and basically cooked through. Don’t wait too long to take it out of the oil, otherwise the fish will be overdone.”

“Okay.” She nodded to indicate that she had committed his words to memory.

“Sheng Sheng?” He poured most of the oil in the wok into a clean, white bowl.

“Hmm?” she answered him as she recalled the recipe. “Time to stir fry the ginger and garlic now?”

He turned the hood fan off. The kitchen suddenly was filled with a brief, peaceful silence. “I like you a lot.”

Her eyes widened. She had not pulled her mind out from the recipe yet.

He smiled, “Will you be my girlfriend?”

“..... We’ve only seen each other a few times.....”

Sheng Sheng Man, can you not always be half a beat behind on everything? T.T.....

“With this sort of thing, the number of times we’ve seen each other doesn’t really matter,” Mo Qingcheng dismissed her argument lightly.

“What if... we aren’t suitable for each other?”

“What if we are?”

“.....”

“If we don’t even start, we won’t know the ending, right?”

“Mm-hmm.....”

.....

.....

.....

.....

All of a sudden, there was a light click. Toupai once again turned on the range hood fan, tossed the minced ginger and garlic into the wok, and then added the other seasonings... At once, the entire kitchen was filled with a delicious aroma. “Smell good?”

His voice gently and enticingly asked her. He had obviously lowered it into a voice that was deliberately alluring.

A voice she could not resist, guiding her answer.

“Yes...”

“Then remember to eat more later.”

“Mm...”

So... their conversation was considered... done now? ...

Apparently, Toupai felt the topic was closed already. He was fully immersed in the cooking mood now. But she... felt as if her entire body was burning up. There was absolutely no difference between her and that carp that had just finished being fried... Totally no difference...

# Chapter 31: Floured Beef Steamed in a Cup

## (1)

“Mo Qingcheng, what did you do to her?” A figure was leaning against the kitchen doorway. It was Feng Ya Song, who was there to hurry them to bring the dishes out. He had always been someone who would very generously dole out verbal assaults in his young nobleman-style voice. And right now, he was taking good advantage of the opportunity to do so, eyeing Gu Sheng and Toupai over from top to bottom. “Look at how red Sheng Sheng’s face is, eh. Worse than a Red Scarf [Young Pioneers of China][1].”

The sauce was ready to come out of the wok and, with some fresh chopped scallions, was poured onto the fish.

Such a delicious aroma wafting everywhere.

Toupai finally picked up his dish of fish and then cast a single glance at Feng Ya Song. The latter immediately put away his teasing expression and very submissively, came into the kitchen, picked up the fish, and brought it back out to the table. You know, these days, if you offended Chef Toupai, you wouldn’t get any good food to eat ...

After Feng Ya Song retreated, the kitchen was still filled with the whirring sound of the range hood fan. She felt as if the noise had shaken her soul out of her body already, and she seemed to hear herself say, “I’ll go out first. I’m not much help anyway...”

What did Mo Qingcheng say?

No idea.

She walked back outside. In the dining room, which was off in a corner beside the living room, everyone was already sitting around the table, a nosy grin on each of their faces as they made room for Gu Sheng. Because of Feng Ya Song’s exclamation at the kitchen door, everyone’s mind was painting his or her own version of a picture, but the main idea was still the same: Toupai... must have done something naughty.

As for what sort of naughty thing he could have done?

Everybody's eyes were fixed on Gu Sheng. To her left was Jue Mei, who was drinking beer, and to her right was Dou Bing, who was holding a pair of chopsticks and stealing tastes of the food. The star of the show was being closely protected by these two, and everyone else was not given any chance to have any fun with her, k? But just like this, our female lead was focused on the nonstop drinking of her orange juice and was even blushing a brighter and brighter red with each sip...

Toupai's cooking speed was incredibly fast.

His efficiency was completely like that of a head chef of a hotel. The dishes were being brought out, one after another: peppered pork stomach and chicken soup, snow peas stuffed with shrimp paste, yuxiang-flavoured thousand layer eggplant, clear noodles in beef curry soup, spicy black bean clams, sautéed black pepper short ribs, poached "pearls" with conch... and the last dish... yan du xian... T.T... This was completely an edible account of how they had met and gotten to know each other...

She had tried to make one or two of these dishes, and although they did not turn out awful, they were nowhere near as enticing as these ones looked. She had not even tasted them yet, and she was willing to bet that they were absolutely delicious.

"Such a feast today, eh." Wwwwk eyes were so wide they were about to fall out. "Just soups alone, there are two different types."

She took a sip of her juice, also staring dazedly at the table of food.

Dou Dou Dou Bing thought she was worried about being teased by everyone and cleared her throat to ask, "Sheng Sheng, how did you initially get into the ancient-style music circle?"

"Me?" Gu Sheng pulled her attention back from the dishes. "Actually... at the start, I was just enslaved by one of my classmates to help her rearrange a song. That's how I came to know of the circle in the first place..."

"You know how to arrange music?" Dou Dou Dou Bing was astonished.

“Then you must compose as well?”

“I’ve composed a few, but they were all sung by people who aren’t really well known.”

Dou Dou Dou Bing’s eyes shone brightly with excitement. She, herself, was part of both the ancient-style music and online voice acting entertainment circles, so she of course knew that a person who could both compose and arrange music was... highly valued. “And you’re a singer? ... Sheng Sheng, I didn’t know you had so many abilities in one package. No wonder Toupai likes you so much T.T ...”

Fei Shao also had a stunned expression on his face. “In the ancient-style music circle, people who can compose and arrange music can walk around sideways and no one would say anything. Sheng Sheng, a lot of the smaller music associations don’t even have one composer in them. Your association president is too lucky! I’ve decided, I’m going to poach you. Sheng Sheng, come to our music association.”

A certain someone was still enthusiastically trying to poach Sheng Sheng when Mo Qingcheng had finished washing all his cooking utensils and equipment and was walking out of the kitchen.

Rolling the sleeves of his shirt back down, he immediately transformed from chef back to the suave, refined Toupai DaRen. He did not seem the least bit surprised about the discussion regarding Sheng Sheng’s composing and arranging talents... Well, he should not be surprised. Gu Sheng had told him before that she wanted to arrange a song for him...

He sat down in the seat beside Gu Sheng.

The beverages in front of each person were different. From beer to white wine to juice, and then over to him... it was yogurt... Such a forever yogurt lover...

Gu Sheng discovered she could not help noticing his every little movement and gesture. Even the way he held his chopsticks, such a little action, seemed to her like it was being magnified by several times. In a very natural way, Mo Qingcheng took his chopsticks, picked out the most tender part of the fish near the fins, and placed it in Gu Sheng’s bowl.

“Didn’t you say it smelled good? Have more.”

“Mm.....” She quietly picked up her bowl and with everyone’s eyes, which were not the least bit discreet, on her, quietly ate her fish.

And then... the tender fish meat on the other side was also dropped into her bowl.

Alright... The two parts of the fish everyone had been eyeing had both been given to the golden master. For fear that Toupai would end up giving the entire fish to his own wife, everyone hastily stretched out their chopsticks, and very quickly, the fish was completely divided up.

Please! Toupai DaRen rarely cooked fish, you know...

Toupai DaRen’s fish was very tasty, you know...

As for Toupai, while everyone was fighting to get a piece of the fish, his chopsticks were already reaching towards the other dishes. In short, the best was all given to Gu Sheng. And she, seeing all that food in her bowl, felt this really would not do and focused all her efforts on eating. One was completely focused on getting food for her with his chopsticks while the other was completely focused on eating. Less than ten minutes into the meal, she already felt she was full T.T.....

Likely because they saw that Toupai DaRen had found the someone to whom he could entrust the rest of his life... everyone started to reminisce about those days when they had first entered the entertainment circle. So sad and frustrating. While munching on the bamboo shoots in her bowl, Dou Dou Dou Bing heaved a long sigh. “The ancient-style music circle is still the best. At least, in that circle, half the fans are guys. The vast majority of fans of the voice-acting circle are girls. There’s honestly no place for a female CV in it...” She looked over at Sheng Sheng with a grin and continued, “But if I was a guy, I would be overwhelmed. For example... these guys sitting here each have tens of thousands of fans, but all of those fans can be classified into one of two categories: one where the fan hopes her idol loves men, and the other where the fan hopes her idol loves her...”

Gu Sheng gave an “mm-hmm” in reply. That was totally normal...

Actually... she fit into neither category. She was purely someone who was satisfied by merely listening to the voice.

As for why things had developed into this relationship, uh...

Fortunately, there was a voice-acting competition going on that night for a video game, and Mo Qingcheng happened to be one of the judges. He needed to first take Gu Sheng back to her school and then go home to get online. After another half an hour, when Gu Sheng finally raised her white flag in surrender and had truly reached the point where she could not eat another bite, Mo Qingcheng also set down his chopsticks. Leaving a room full of people, the two of them left first.

This particular hour happened to be when traffic was the worst.

Gu Sheng had originally said that she would go back herself, but Mo Qingcheng was already leading her down to the nearest metro station.

She mentally gauged the time. Seven stops in total. To go to her university and back would take a total of one hour, roundtrip, just enough time to make it on time for the competition... Her mind felt a little bit more at ease after she worked this out. The heat inside the metro station was very ample, and as the two of them stood on the platform waiting for the train, they each held their own jackets. She looked up to check the clock for the waiting time. The next train was still another 2 minutes and 48 seconds from entering the station.

Mo Qingcheng was answering a phone call.

Her gaze drifted around and settled on the billboard across the track.

It just so happened to be... an ad for that particular video game.

"Hurry, hurry! I need to go back and listen to the competition..." Behind her, a young girl sounded very anxious.

"There's still time, there's still time." Another young girl tried to calm the first. "The character for tonight, I thought your idol didn't sign up for it? His character should be coming up next week, right?"

"Don't tell me... you... didn't... know... that my biggest idol... Qiang Qing



Ci... is a judge... tonight...”

cold sweat.....

She did not dare look back, but she clearly heard that the girl’s every word was spoken through gritted teeth...

T.T .....

She glanced over at Toupai, who very calmly gave an “mm” and said into the phone, “Alright, I know,” as well as something along the lines of doing additional studies. She could not tell if he truly had not heard or had simply heard so many similar things before he was basically numb to it all... Anyway, the little unknown that she was could not comprehend the mentality of people like Toupai, who had long since been elevated to god status...

“Toupai’s one of the judges? Toupai’s one of the judges?! AH, AH, AH, AH! Why didn’t you say so earlier? If you had told me earlier, I wouldn’t have gone to eat curry fish balls and could have saved those ten minutes I spent waiting in line!”

.....

Two hardcore fans...

Beside these two young girls was someone who very apparently was not familiar with the online entertainment circle, and when she saw the two enthusiastically discussing the same noun – “toupai” – she became slightly intrigued and inquired about it. Immediately, she became subject to brainwashing and indoctrination. Without exception, every topic revolved around the lines of the unrivalled allure of Toupai DaRen, that he had more than a hundred thousand fans online but yet was a low-key person, that he did not have a single black mark on his profile...

.....

Gu Sheng continued to look up at the countdown clock for the next train. Another 20 seconds.

Why did she have a desire to protect Toupai from being found out?

Feeling very guiltily apprehensive, she prayed that time would move faster so they could hurry up and get on the metro. By now, a bright light could be seen at the far end of the track. The train was finally arriving.

“Do you know when I started to like Toupai? So early on. I’m his old fan, so old I’m like cremated remains. I’ve loved him since he started to do the dubbing for Gin Ichimaru[2]! You have to go back and listen to it! I swear, the instant you hear him in that, you’ll become his diehard fan. I cried back when I heard him in that role...”

(◡◡).....

Such a coincidence.

Me too...

The doors to the metro train opened. Inside, there were not too many people, enough room to squeeze in those two young girls and the two of them. Mo Qingcheng had finally finished his phone call. He brought Gu Sheng into a corner in the area where two train cars connected, encircling her protectively. He was tall, and he stood on the outside, using his body to stop anyone who was bumping too close to them.

But... this posture of his – his hands pressed against the wall, his two arms on either side of her and enclosing her in front of his body – was really...

Was really one that made a person feel too awkward to move.

“When was the first time you heard my voice?” Mo Qingcheng had lowered his voice slightly to a volume that was suitable for two people to carry out a quiet, private conversation.

He actually heard what those people had said?

(◡◡)..... And he was so calm about it..... Truly, such a veteran in the circle.

“Also Gin Ichimaru,” she answered softly, feeling a little sheepish. “In the dubbing you did for Gin Ichimaru.”

“Him...” Mo Qingcheng chuckled, “Have you ever noticed, Jue Mei Sha

Yi's and my name are both somehow related to him? 'Jue Mei Sha Yi' is the name of one of Gin's fighting moves, and 'qiang qing ci[3]' is the color of Ichimaru Gin's captain's robe."

.....

.....

Of course she knew...

"Qiang qing ci" was the color inside Ichimaru Gin's robe.....

And both Jue Mei and Qiang Qing Ci had done the voice acting for this character before, except one of them did it for the earlier seasons while the other did it for later seasons... This point had been dug up a long time ago by fans already and been very logically reasoned out. However, to hear the subject of the discussion personally explain it to her several years later was still such a very happy thing.

Her favourite Japanese anime.

Her favourite character.

And her favourite voice actor doing the dubbing. It was too perfect.

The train was beginning to announce the next station, but she was thinking of the scene in the anime, when Gin Ichimaru was leaving his beloved, Rangiku, knowing that he was going to go undercover and would be in dangerous surroundings..... Very nonchalantly, very tenderly, he had said that one sentence.

Gu Sheng exhaled lightly. "My favourite line is when Gin was leaving, what he said to Rangiku- ..."

She had not finished what she was saying before Mo Qingcheng very naturally had already continued for her, "Goodbye, Rangiku... I'm sorry."

He did not need any time to build-up the necessary feeling at all.

His voice was absolutely perfect and was immediately able to rouse the emotion in the listener...

Back then, with headphones on, she had watched this scene over and

over more than a dozen times just so she could listen to Qiang Qing Ci's flawless voice acting... And now, before her eyes, beside her ear, this voice... just for her... was reproducing that original moment...

So happy and blessed...

So happy and blessed she could die T.T ...

[1] 红领巾. The Young Pioneers of China is a youth organization for children between the ages of six to fourteen. A red scarf is the only uniform piece for this group, and the group itself is often simply referred to as the "Red Scarves."

[2] Fictional character from the Japanese anime/manga series, Bleach.

[3] 锖青磁. Just to recap, "qiang qing ci" is actually a unique color. 锖 "qiang" is a certain color of a mineral, 青 "qing" can mean a blue-green color, and 磁 "ci" means magnetic. It is referring to the metallic, shiny turquoise/teal color that certain minerals possess.

# Chapter 32: Floured Beef Steamed in a Cup (2)

“Next stop...”

Inside the train, a female voice announced the name of the next station in standard Mandarin.

Some people exited and others entered. This station was a hub and was notorious for being busy and crowded. In only a moment, the train was packed with people. Fortunately, she was standing in a corner and with Mo Qingcheng on the outside protecting her, she did not need to worry about being bumped and crammed by people.

But poor him...

Seeing the mass of people behind him, she tugged apologetically at the hem of his shirt and looked up at him. “Step in a little closer...” After saying this, she tried her best to shrink into the corner a little bit more.

Mo Qingcheng seemed as if he still wanted to give her some space, but the people behind him really were shoving up tight against him so he moved in slightly closer to her again.

The voice of Gin was still echoing in her ears...

And his real live person was so close to her...

Gu Sheng breathed out lightly. “Four more stops...”

“Mm.”

T.T.....

Nothing else to say...

She suddenly remembered the late night girl talk she and her dormmates had had in second-year university when the other two girls in their dorm room had each started dating. One of them had said she had started liking her guy because she saw him biting his straw while he was drinking a soft drink, biting the end of his pen when he was doing

homework problems, and even biting the mouth of a beverage bottle when he was having a drink, and for some unexplainable reason, she had found this very cute and it had made her heart flutter... The remaining three could only sigh over what a silly start this was to a relationship.

But now...

She had always been a voice lover and had always believed that one of the prerequisites of her future boyfriend was a nice-sounding voice with proper Mandarin pronunciation, but... was she really... for this reason... for this reason alone going to start a relationship?

So ... incredible.

It had been more than two hours since he asked her to be his girlfriend.

Girlfriend... Qiang Qing Ci's girlfriend...

Gu Sheng's lips unconsciously turned up in a smile. Her eyes were still focused straight ahead, her gaze crossing under his arm and fixing itself on the backpack zipper of the person behind him... just so she did not have to look at him, and he did not feel as if she was looking at him.

As for peripheral vision, that was something she honestly could not control, you know? T.T...

Station after station... More and more people entered the train car. Mo Qingcheng was getting squeezed more and more as well and had switched to using his elbows on either side of her to support himself against the wall. Of course... that meant he was a little closer to her yet again.

His skin... was honestly really nice...

T.T..... Even if she did not want to look, she would not be able to avoid it.

"In a moment, when we arrive at the stop, get off the train and head straight up. Your school is just a five minute walk from exit number two."

"Mm." She actually was very clear already on all of this. After all, she had been at this university for more than three years...

"If any strangers talk to you along the way, just ignore them."

“Mm.” T.T ... Are you treating me like a child? ...

“I won’t be accompanying you back. I need to head over to the other side right away and take the opposite train back.”

“Mm...”

“Will you be mad?”

“Huh?” She raised her head and narrowly missed slamming into his nose. She could not move backwards at all and had no choice but to look wide-eyed up at his eyes that were right in front of her – those eyes that were so gorgeous they caused jealousy, envy, and hatred in people – and answer his question. “I won’t be mad. Why would I be mad? ... You’re going to an official, public event. It won’t be good if you’re late. You really didn’t need to take me back. I could have come back myself.”

When the train was nearly at the station, they finally squeezed their way to the door while he half-shielded her from the crowd.

The two of them were practically in battle mode as they stepped out of the car. When the train pulled away, the surroundings instantly grew much quieter. Gu Sheng hugged her down jacket in her arms, said goodbye to him, and then quickly hurried onto the up escalator.

The escalator rose up slowly as Toupai stepped into the metro train heading in the return direction.

Phew...

At last... she was headed back to school.

She cast a final glance at the train and pulled out her transit card from her bag. She still felt like she was floating along and did not know what she was thinking. Actually, she was not thinking anything at all.

Back in her dormitory room, she was the only one there.

She glanced at the time. There should be another half an hour before the competition started. She opened up her own YY and first entered the competition’s channel, where she heard the pre-event host playing some pre-recorded music. Still another half an hour, but there were already

15,000 people online. So amazing... From her bookshelf, she randomly chose a book in her field of study and began flipping through.

Mo Qingcheng's voice and facial expressions constantly flitted into her mind.

I like you a lot.

Will you be my girlfriend?

What if we are suitable?

If we don't even start, we won't know the ending, right?

.....

.....

No good. She could not focus at all to read T.T.....

Luckily, the competition was about to begin.

Just as she was about to search for Qiang Qing Ci, her private chat window popped up.

Qiang Qing Ci: Got home with no problems.

Gu Sheng: (◡v◡) Mm.

Qiang Qing Ci: You'll have to have fun yourself. I need to start now.

Gu Sheng: Mm.

She discovered she had completely inherited Toupai's practice and had made "mm" a habit... But for him, it was because he had just woken up and very naturally used "mm" to answer questions. As for her... it was entirely because she did not know what to say.

"Alright, folks, let's start with introducing tonight's four judges." The hostess's voice came through her headset. "They are, the video game's designer, Teacher Shen Ming; sound designer, Teacher Zhao Tianyi; voice actor, Teacher Zhang Xiao'ou; and voice actor, Teacher Qiang Qing Ci. [1]"

When Qiang Qing Ci's name was announced, there were many people



who immediately got excited...

However, his own home-raised fans were in a totally cool and composed state. Gu Sheng decided to check out these fans of his fan club and opened up the online name list on the left side. Rough estimate... more than a thousand. The ten top-level administrators of the club were all present and were very strictly keeping order and control of their fan group.

rest face in palms...

That was part of his appeal. In public, his fans absolutely would not embarrass him or themselves by doing things like spamming the screen and bringing criticism .....

She began to feel an unexplainable sense of pride...

But they had no control over the random fan that did not belong to the official fan club. You had to let people get excited, right? T.T.....

Fortunately, this was an impressive event, and the hostess was very capable of controlling the scene, quickly taking advantage of the current atmosphere of excitement to transition into the first segment of the competition. "Alright, we are now officially starting the program for our competition. Please, let's invite our first contestant up onto the mike--"

For some reason, Gu Sheng cast a glance at Qiang Qing Ci's ID.

And then, she sat there as a nobody spectator, listening to one contestant after another deliver the lines required by the panel as well as their own chosen monologue. There were nervous performances as well as self-confident, domineering ones... So fun listening to them, ah.

All of a sudden, someone threw out her name on the public comment box:

"I see Sheng Sheng Man..." "Where, where?" "She really is here. The little golden master came ah ah ah ah....."

Her chest tightened.

In her moment of bewilderment, her private chat window suddenly

popped up a message from a stranger: Golden Master Daren, hurry and exit. Change to a different ID and come back in...

This line of words had just jumped out on her screen, but it was already too late. In her headset, the rapid sound of multiple alerts came in like a furious storm. No exaggeration, it was a furious storm of friend requests..... And her computer... in an instant... froze...

T.T... Computer froze...

She wanted to exit out of the YY room, but now she was not even able to. She promptly decided to do a hard reboot of her computer.

Oh no, oh no. Spamming like this in the channel... She brought trouble to Toupai for sure now... She was going crazy from anxiousness, waiting one second after another for her computer to finish restarting. Then immediately, she changed to her alternate ID and slipped back into the YY room again.

Fortunately, the whole situation had been suppressed by the event staff in charge of keeping control and order.

And fortunately, when her main user ID had exited so quickly, it had not brought about any particularly bad bout of spamming.

With a very, very guilty conscience, she sent a private message to Toupai.

Sheng Sheng Man: I'm inexperienced... Forgot to change to my alternate ID... T.T

This was completely the Toupai effect, you know? ...

She had always run around with her main ID before and no one could even be bothered to notice, you know? ...

Qiang Qing Ci: pat pat Keep calm.

.....

.....

T.T Not possible to keep calm... Her heart was about to leap out of her

chest from being so scared...

Plus...

Staring at those few words he wrote...

Why did she have this feeling, like her heart was melting? ...

She placed her hands on the keyboard and was about to send a message back to him when she heard the host suddenly make a remark:

“And now, let’s invite Teacher Qiang Qing Ci to provide some comments and critique for our contestants.”

Gu Sheng’s fingers, which had been busy typing, immediately stopped.

In her headset, his clear, composed voice came through, completely different from his responses to the joking atmosphere within his own association, or from the gentle, doting style he had used in the YY fan event. It was still his voice, still that trademark effect of his where the instant he opened his mouth, it would instantly steal a girl’s heart, but now, people could also sense his professionalism:

“This was tonight’s first round of contestants, and there were several whose sense of emotion in their verbal delivery was pretty good. There was a good sense of tension, and they were able to enrich the words in the script. So why, then, were high scores not given? We, the judges, all have the same opinion. Although your voices are all very good, your treatment and deliverance of the script is only really touching on the surface.” He paused briefly. “How can I properly express this? Our contest tonight is for the dubbing of a character in a video game. This character has his own feelings, his own background, and his own experiences growing up. Even when he speaks, because of his individual personality and standpoints, he has his own thought processes. He even has his own purpose for speaking.

“Of course, we may not necessarily provide you with all this background information, but this is where you have room to work with. For example...” Qiang Qing Ci explained with a smile in his voice, “Let me give you a little example. Our character has a line that goes like this. ‘Just

now, when I saw you kneeling in the great hall, I suddenly felt that, in my previous life, I was a coward.’ We had a contestant who delivered the line like this– –”

Gu Sheng was listening very carefully.

At this point, there was suddenly one second of silence.

Then, Qiang Qing Ci could be heard emulating one of the contestants. His tone was forlorn and sorrowful, and in an especially embellished way, he recited the line, “Just now...when I saw you kneeling in the great hall, I suddenly felt that, in my previous life, I was a coward.”

That last word, especially, was filled with extreme grief and enunciated particularly clearly.

So similar!

She had listened to this contestant deliver his lines, and though there was a slight difference, the tone, the emotion, the pauses he took in the script, and so on were all so similar to the original...

Qiang Qing Ci reverted back to his normal voice. “It was very sorrowful, very sorrowful indeed... but the emotions were too exaggerated. You wanted too much to use the emotions that you added to the script to reach the audience. But what it lacked is the emotion that will touch us, the judges – that is, the character’s own emotions. Trust me. A normal person does not talk like he is in a stage play.”

He paused for a moment.

“This line, everyone can have their own way of interpreting it. You can choose to use a self-mocking tone, like you had despised yourself for a long time already.”

He used a self-deprecating tone to recite the lines once. His voice was flat, but cool and detached. At once, his voice painted the picture of a lonely, dejected man leaning against the wall beside the main hall of a temple. A cold, self-mocking image. You could even visualize the look in his eyes and on his face, which showed he had given up on all hope for himself and for his future...

He cleared his throat and spoke again.

“You can also choose an interpretation where the character feels guilty and regretful about the past but still carries hope inside of him.”

He spoke the same line again, but this time, it was filled with feeling.

Now, the picture conjured up was completely different: A tall man standing before the woman he loved, tenderly, yet firmly gazing deep into her eyes... Telling her the guilt and regret he felt... And also, the determination in his eyes of the promise of the future he would give her.

T.T.....

Once again, he had proved himself worthy of being... the one she liked, the one she had always liked... Qiang Qing Ci.

This time, the screen spammers were not just his fans. The several tens of thousands of online audience members all exploded at once.

“This is what we call a professional, ah.....” “Such a kind judge, such a kind judge (◡◡).....” “DaRen, you’re being too nice to the contestants coming later ah ah ah ah! Basically on-the-spot coaching ah ah ah ah! Those poor people in the first batch ah ah ah ah!” “Toupai DaRen you are TOO attractive!!!! When you, my flower blooms, the hundreds of other flowers must wither[2] ah, ah, ah, ah!!!!”

.....

.....

.....

.....

Gu Sheng was in complete admiration and reverence of him.

As Toupai wrapped up his comments, he finally chuckled and, using his unique low voice, he presented his concluding remarks:

“No specific character background was given because we wanted each contestant to provide his or her own interpretation. There is no wrong interpretation, as long as you are able to cause us to empathize and feel

for you.”

\*

[1] When someone reaches a certain status or experience in a field, they are often referred to as 老师 “teacher” by layman or those less experienced.

[2] 花开后百花杀. A line taken from the Tang dynasty poem, 《不第后赋菊》 “Failing the Imperial Examination, then a Poem for the Chrysanthemum” written by Huang Chao 黄巢. This particular line in the poem says that when the chrysanthemum blooms, all other flowers must wither away under its beauty. But the online user in YY is using this to declare that Toupai’s talents overshadow all others.

\*

#### Additional Comments:

Random additional little trivia. The line the contestants had to recite is actually a line taken out of MBFB’s other novel, One Life, One Incarnation: Beautiful Bones. (A novel completely different in style from RRMV. Been mulling over whether I want to translate that one next... except there are so many poems in there I would probably be torturing myself!)

# Chapter 33: Floured Beef Steamed in a Cup (3)

Toupai's advice did have a significant effect.

The subsequent contestants all did benefit from his teaching in some way or another, and many of the ones who were sharper and could grasp the concept better were even able to make impromptu adjustments to their performance, taking this competition to a whole new level and value to be appreciated.

It was nearly 10:30, and the official competition events finally came to a close for the night.

The hostess suddenly exhaled a long breath, and then her tone changed into an excited one. "The competition will end here for tonight. Thank you to all of our judges and teachers, our contestants, as well as all the people who worked to make this happen. In five minutes, after all the staff and judges have exited, we have a surprise mystery gift for all of you. Everyone take a short break, please, and we will see you in a little bit."

And with that last sentence, every person who had been on microphone disappeared.

The only person remaining in the room was the hostess, who was playing a recording of the video game's theme song...

It was not clear who first noticed something peculiar, but comments started incessantly popping up on the public comment screen: "Oh gawd, hurry and check out the administrator list..." "Waaaah! What kind of gift is this AH!..... oh god, I'm going to die.".....

All the people who had originally been planning on exiting the YY room at once grew excited, and everyone immediately clicked on the list of administrators.

Only Qiang Qing Ci and the hostess were present at first, but... the number of administrators was continuously increasing.

One, two, three... More and more “yellow IDs[1]” were entering the YY room.

Jue Mei Sha Yi, Feng Ya Song, Dou Dou Dou Bing, Little T. They represented Wanmei Voice Acting Group...

Si Wu Xie [Thoughts are Pure], Xiao Bai [Little White], Die Die [Fold], Fu Sheng Wu Meng [Dreamless Floating Life], Wwwwk. They represented Liu Nian Zhi Sheng [The Voice of Fleeting Time] Voice Acting Group...

Fei Shao, Bei Dou Xiao Xing [Little Star of the Big Dipper], Wan Wan Rao Rao [Twists and Turns]. They represented Shui Mo [Ink] Music Association...

Ling Long Ti Tou, Jian Jian [Gradually], Little He, 2Yue [2nd Month]. These represented Gu Cha Wu Xiang [Ancient Tea Without Fragrance] Music Association...

Two entertainment circles. And the four most veteran associations in these circles had made their appearance.

Oh my god.....

(◕◕).....

When Gu Sheng saw all these names, she nearly fainted. This mystery gift was simply too shocking. Never before had she seen such a big line-up. Even though, because of Qiang Qing Ci, she had met all of these famous names in Wanmei already and would not freak out like she did in the beginning anymore, for the rest of the fans here on YY... these personas were all very mysterious to them.

Most importantly, out of the hundreds of associations out there, these four were at the very top of the pyramid.

And even to the newer members within these topmost associations, the veterans of the association had a god-like status...

None of them accepted new projects from those outside of their association.

Occasionally, they would participate in certain events, but it was



usually as a favour for a good friend.

So, for them to be here like this, to suddenly be here in this way, was really too amazing, you know? T.T ...

The news spread in an instant, and the number of people in the YY room was increasing rapidly. Many of them who entered the room would cry on the public comment screen: "I finally managed to get in. Was about to grow wings from being stuck and waiting..." "My most beloved idol ah, ah, ah, ah! My goddess AAAH! My male god AAAH! ... Oh god ..."

Five minutes seemed to tick by very slowly.

The comment screen looked like it was going to explode from all the spamming. The staff in charge of maintaining order kept trying to restrain the rate at which comments were allowed to be posted, but they were completely unable to control this explosion of posts that was happening on the screen. In the end, they just gave up...

After all, the official event had ended already. The point of this late night event was to make everyone high with excitement anyways.

"Okay, you've all seen it now, right?" The hostess was giddy as well, completely immersed into the role of being a voice lover. "Our two biggest voice acting associations and two biggest music associations are the ones who wrote and performed the theme song for this video game and provided the voice acting for the promotional videos. Definitely an awesome benefit here tonight for fans and can also be considered... a belated Valentine's Day present. So everyone, treat this like your god or goddess is giving you a late Valentine's Day celebration. As for me... I'm going to happily go off and be a little fan. Handing over the mike now..."

The hostess handed off the microphone.

"Everyone.... Long time no see." Liu Nian Zhi Sheng Voice Acting Group's Fu Sheng Wu Meng was the first to speak, in a voice so gentle it seemed like water could be squeezed out of it. "I'm at the airport right now, using my mobile phone to log into YY. When the performance starts a little later, if there's any sound quality issues, please bear with and forgive me."

Die Die: “No worries, Wu Meng Dada. Give us a couple of cat cries and we’ll consider that our compensation.”

“Meow... What did you say? I can’t really hear you. Meow...” Fu Sheng Wu Meng gave a couple chuckles, soft, gentle, and sweet...

The comment box was immediately filled with comments of “Sooooo cute!!!!” “Dada, requesting to marry you!!!!”.....

Die Die coughed a couple times. “Where’s that dignity we had all agreed to remember to keep?”

“Meow... What’s that you said? Aaah, such bad reception in the airport... Let me hand over the mike.”

Die Die immediately burst out in laughter. She cleared her throat before officially taking over the task of being host of the event. “Since out of this group of old friends, I’m the only one who has the side job of being an online emcee as well, I’ll be the guest host for tonight’s late night event..... Tonight was not easy to pull together. Besides one or two people who could not make it, basically the whole crew is present. Is that right, Toupai DaRen?”

Toupai was one of the judges tonight so naturally, he was one of the main attractions of the night.

But...

Gu Sheng felt that ... everyone seemed to just like teasing him, eh...

Only a single, nonchalant word in reply: “Mm.”

Toupai was certainly concise...

There was absolutely no hint of the logical, calm manner of speaking he had used a while ago when he was a judge, and he had reverted back to his nature where words were as precious as gold. However, that did not prevent the fans, who were no longer being restrained, from flooding the screen with torrential outpourings of love declarations T.T.....

“I suspect it must be because it is the day after Valentine’s Day, so everyone is free,” Die Die continued with a charming laugh. “Is that right,

Toupai DaRen? Last night, a lot of people must have been really busy...”

“I suppose.” Toupai seemed to be able to guess where she was heading with her words.

“So... Qiang Qing Ci Dada... yesterday, you must have been very busy too, right? What were you doing?”

T.T.....

Gu Sheng immediately became embarrassed...

Tens of thousands of spectators... and things still managed to come back around to this topic? ...

“Me?” Qiang Qing Ci gave a chuckle. His answer was given in an understated tone, but was also plain and clear. “I did what I was supposed to do.”

I did... what I was... supposed to do...

This way of answering basically confirmed Mu Mu’s Weibo comment. Then, there was also the song he had posted himself... There were tens of thousands of people in the room, yet Qiang Qing Ci, who was on the microphone, was still clearly much more composed than her, the one who was using an alternate ID to secretly listen in ...

She dragged her finger over one of the pages of her book, scratching it incessantly. She wanted to make herself calm down a bit, and then calm down even more.

Feng Ya Song suddenly turned on his microphone. “Die Die, you aren’t being very kind, eh. There’s so many of us here, but how come you only have eyes for Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen? Oooh... Don’t tell me you’ve had a crush on Toupai for a long time now, eh?”

Die Die was thrilled. “Eight out of ten girls have a crush on Toupai. I’m one who doesn’t follow the crowd. I openly love him, of course.”

Fei Shao was amused as well. “I openly love Toupai as well... Don’t think that just because you’re hogging the mike, you can declare your love as you wish, eh.”

Everyone was bantering back and forth with laughs and jeers.

Those closest to Toupai were taking on an obvious stance of protecting him.

Fortunately, Die Die was only using Toupai's popularity as a way to warm-up the crowd, and she quickly jumped into the main topic. "The opening song for this late night event is actually a medley. How are we going to make this medley? Tonight, the four most beautiful 'beauties' are going to give you the most explosive opening program."

There was a brief moment of silence.

Then, immediately following was the biggest surge of exhilaration the night had seen yet. Everybody was elated...

And the biggest reason the crowd was seething with excitement was because Die Die had stopped talking right at this point and had not said whom those four were. The public comments screen was being flooded incessantly as people typed their own idol's name. Each artiste had his or her own fans, and now, all of them seemed as if they had been dosed with stimulants. And plus, it was claimed that it would be tonight's four most beautiful "beauties." Well, of course, my own DaRen is the most beautiful!!!!

Naturally, the names being shouted the most on the screen were the most popular male artiste of each of the four associations.

Qiang Qing Ci, Fu Sheng Wu Meng, Bei Dou Xiao Xing, and Jian Jian.

And Qiang Qing Ci's name was the one most furiously coming up on the screen...

Die Die laughed, and without saying anything more, she began playing the background music.

The background music for the four songs had already been edited together. The first note of the first song had just rung out and then someone had already posted its name on the screen: "Yangguan Diao" [Tune of Yangguan[2]]. Bei Dou Xiao Xing's microphone indicator lit up, and his slightly husky voice was singing the first line:

[[<https://youtu.be/c2GK2ZuXr9s>]]

[0:33] “The glint of the blade is relentlessly pursuing and does not let one escape. Who’s embrace can one fall into?”

A midnight battlefield. In the desert, the desolate smoke signals sway like wild grass --“

Sure enough... guessed correctly.

No one had expected that the song chosen to open the event would be one about the smoke signals of war on the desert, brotherhood, and patriotism.

An event opener that made everyone boil in excitement.

Since this was a medley, each person would only sing half a song.

Soon, the music transitioned out of this song’s chorus and cut directly into the chorus of “Feng Qi Tian Lan” [Wind Rises Up at Tianlan]. The background music had been edited flawlessly, so perfect and had flowed so smoothly that it seemed like a single song.

[[<https://youtu.be/Bs2VvB83wJw>]]

This time, it was Jian Jian’s turn:

[1:22] “Years from now, the pages of the history books will have this night recorded.

The long limestone streets tainted with scenes of parting through separation or death --”

A song of righteous passion -- a city falling captive, a nation’s downfall, a general who would rather spill her blood on that long street rather than surrender -- was sung in a heartrending manner that awed the listeners...

Jian Jian’s voice was particularly clear and resonant, completely different from the previous song’s deep and low quality, and carried a distinct sense of mournfulness.

The tens of thousands of people were all completely captivated as they listened.

“Meow... Such pressure.” Fu Sheng Wu Meng chose this unexpected moment to act cute.

It was apparent that he was the next singer.

Sure enough, once the chorus of the previous song was done, the music immediately cut into the chorus of “Shan He Yong Mu”[A Country Forever to be Admired]. Fu Sheng Wu Meng truly did as he had said he would, using his mobile phone in some unknown corner of the airport as he started sing. He had a reputation of being the most adorably fun character in his association but also the male with the most beautiful singing voice. When he opened his mouth to sing, his voice immediately ceased its cuteness:

[[<https://youtu.be/b-gui-fvOgc>]]

[0:48] “For you, I sing 300 nights of love songs. Dust and dirt swirl in the air, but they are only a moment in passing

When you looked off into the distance, were you willing to let go?

A scene seemed to be conjured up of a proud, untamable young man, his bold, unrestrained attitude apparent as he stood, cup of wine in hand, before a troop of ten thousand.

Three people had sung...

Three people had sung...

Everyone could guess who the next person was.

Regardless of whether one was comparing popularity or singing ability, besides Qiang Qing Ci, no one else was able to exceed the previous three singing “generals”... Which song was it going to be? The name was already emerging in Gu Sheng’s mind...

In the comment screen, besides Qiang Qing Ci’s name, the name continuously flooding the screen was...

“Qing Jin Tian Xia [Overturn The World].”

[1] Recall the YY levels mentioned earlier (refer to chapter 6 footnote). The “yellow ID” level is the fourth level and the “yellow IDs” in a channel have administrative rights.

[2] 阳关. Yangguan, or the Yang Pass. A mountain pass which marked the edge of the westernmost administrative area of ancient China. This was the last stop before heading out of China into the Western Regions.

\*

### Additional Comments:

These comments hopefully explain why the songs “make sense” together, and why everyone so logically arrived at the conclusion that the fourth song to be sung would be Qing Jin Tian Xia [Overturn the World].

All of the songs in this chapter, including the fourth one that was only mentioned, are composed, arranged, and sung by 河图 He Tu. (He also composed, arranged, and sang the Hua Xu Yin theme song, which Hui3r posted, if any of you are following the HXY translation.)

阳关调 Yangguan Diao [Tune of Yangguan]

[0:33] 刀光 不依不饶 跌进谁的怀抱

The glint of the blade is relentlessly pursuing and does not let one escape. Who’s embrace can one fall into?

午夜战场大漠荒烟 如狂草

A midnight battlefield. In the desert, the desolate smoke signals sway like wild grass

霜降 满城萧条 冷了长亭短桥

Frost has descended. The entire city is bleak and deserted

眉间朱砂乱世年华 如刻刀

The vermilion mark between her brows and her beauty that can bring chaos to the world are like a blade

[0:46] 塞上 乌衣年少 换谁遗世的笑

At the border area, a youth dressed in black puts on a smile of someone

who has cast aside all worldly cares

剑指天山西出阳关 人迹渺

His sword points towards Tian Shan [Heavenly Mountains] and he marches west, out from Yangguan Pass. The trail he leaves behind is small and indistinct.

风沙 磨断古道 蔓延谁的眉梢

The wind and sand erode away at the ancient road. Whose brow do they spread across?

旌旗连城浊酒倾觞 暮云烧

Banner after banner seem to join together. Wine is poured into the goblet. The clouds burn in the light of sundown.

[0:59] 雪落苍茫 雪若白发 雪若花凋 惹乱飞鸟

Snow falls on the vast stretches. The snow is like white hair. The snow is like wilted flowers. It disturbs the flying birds.

同望苍霞 同去天涯 同穿素缟 明月同邀

Together, we look upon the scarlet clouds in the sky. Together, we go to the horizons of the earth. Together, we dress only in plain, white garments. The bright moon invites us, together.

[1:12] 断了弓弦 断了心跳 断了浮生 望断缥缈

The bowstring is broken. The heartbeat is broken. This short life is broken. We hope to break this feeling of being unreal.

心如三月 心如荒草 心如泥沼 陷了也好

The heart is like the third month [spring]. The heart is like the wild grasses. The heart is like a morass. Perhaps it is a good thing it has thrown itself completely in.

[1:26] 目光 透过剑鞘 纠缠谁的眼角

My eyes look past my scabbard, and whose eyes do they meet?

他上城楼他解战袍瀚海云涛 寄逍遥



He ascends the city wall. He loosens his battle armour. The ocean of clouds move like waves, free and unfettered.

[1:39] 断墙 千年不倒 铭刻谁的记号

Broken walls. They had not fallen for thousands of years. Whose mark has been carved into them?

羌声单薄 红尘颠倒 换谁凭栏 谁折腰

The sound of the Qiang flute[a] is frail. The world has been turned upside down. Who will stand high up and lean over the parapet? Who will bow down?

[1:52] 江山 风雨飘摇 浪荡谁的心跳

The country is unstable, as if tossed about in wind and rain. Whose heart is shaken by this?

盛世长安花对残阳 忘前朝

In the period of prosperity and peace, when the flowers are looking up at the setting sun, forget the previous dynasty.

(interlude)

[2:32] 雪落苍茫 雪若白发 雪若花凋 惹乱飞鸟

Snow falls on the vast stretches. The snow is like white hair. The snow is like wilted flowers. It disturbs the flying birds.

同望苍霞 同去天涯 同穿素缟 明月同邀

Together, we look upon the scarlet clouds in the sky. Together, we go to the horizons of the earth. Together, we dress only in plain, white garments. The bright moon invites us, together.

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The bowstring is broken. The heartbeat is broken. This short life is broken. We hope to break this feeling of being unreal.

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The heart is like the third month [spring]. The heart is like the wild

grasses. The heart is like a morass. Perhaps it is a good thing it has thrown itself completely in.

[2:59] 目光 透过剑鞘 纠缠谁的眼角

My eyes look past my scabbard, and whose eyes do they meet?

他上城楼他解战袍瀚海云涛 寄逍遥

He ascends the city wall. He loosens his battle armour. The ocean of clouds move like waves, free and unfettered.

[3:13] 断墙 千年不倒 铭刻谁的记号

Broken walls. They had not fallen for thousands of years. Whose mark has been carved into them?

羌声单薄红尘颠倒换谁凭栏 谁折腰

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The country is unstable, as if tossed about in wind and rain. Whose heart is shaken by this?

盛世长安花对残阳 忘前朝

In the period of prosperity and peace, when the flowers are looking up at the setting sun, forget the previous dynasty.

[3:39] 你的手 牵谁衣角 一路奔逃

Whose hem is your hand holding onto along your journey?

狼烟烽火的喧嚣

Amid the noise of the smoke signals and fire beacons

[3:52] 谁煮酒 一生醉笑 千杯难销

Who will warm the wine? A drunken smile for an entire lifetime, where a thousand cups are not enough

浮花浪蕊的拥抱

To be in the embrace of floating blossoms

[a] The Qiang people are an ethnic minority and in ancient China, lived in the western reaches. The Qiang flute is a vertical flute-like instrument made of bamboo. <http://traditions.cultural-china.com/en/115T4989T11094.html>

\*

The remaining 3 songs, including the one yet to be sung in the next chapter, are all part of the same album called 倾尽天下 Qing Jin Tian Xia [Overturn the World]. The album and all the songs in it are based on the fictional story of the fall of one dynasty and the rise of another. There is an entire backstory, written like a historical account, to the album. I'm going to include the translated "historical account," then provide the translated lyrics for the songs that appeared in this chapter.

## CHRONOLOGY

15th year of Changping:

12th month: Bai Yan is born in Dong Qi. Father deceased, mother a convicted criminal.

16th year of Changping:

5th month: Entire country is struck by drought. People everywhere are starving.

6th month: Emperor Ming of Wei Dynasty holds a sacrificial ceremony to Heaven.

8th month: Wu Sheng of the area outside the southern border brings his junior sister, Wu Ying and recommends himself, a mere commoner, for service in the imperial court. In one night, Wu Sheng builds the Nine Dragon Pagoda in the emperor's palace and calls the Dragon to deliver rain and moisten the world. Emperor Ming appoints him to the role of Teacher of the State because of his remarkable abilities. That night, the fourth son, Rong Xi of Emperor Ming, Rong Mu is born.

9th month: Emperor Ming appoints Rong Xi as crown prince and

decrees forgiveness of all crimes in the country.

On the day of the decree, Bai Yan's mother, the woman surnamed Wu, is released from prison. In the twelfth month, she dies of sickness.

.....

36th year of Changping:

6th month: Emperor Ming dies, the crown prince ascends the throne, and the era title is changed to Chongning. He is known as Emperor Jing of Wei. The crown princess, Xiao Yu becomes empress.

Imperial Historian, Gu Jiashan retires from the imperial court. Gu Changning, Su Jing, and Xie Qing take up positions in the Office of Imperial History.

.....

1st year of Chongning:

10th month: Zhu Sha enters the palace and is bestowed the rank of Meiren [Beautiful Lady][b].

2nd year of Chongning:

3rd month: Zhu Sha is appointed the rank of Zhaoyi.

9th month: She becomes with child and is risen to the rank of Zhaofei.

12th month: She miscarries. Emperess Jing is deposed on the crime of plotting the murder of an imperial offspring. That same night, the former empress hangs herself in the Cold Palace[c].

3rd year of Chongning:

1st month: Zhu Sha is bestowed the rank and title, Guifei [Imperial Consort]

.....

4th year of Chongning:

5th month: The eldest daughter, Xie Wan, of Xie Huaijin, governor of Tianlan, wins the imperial martial demonstration held before the

emperor and is appointed as General of Tianlan.

7th month: Mu Qinghe, second son of Left Prime Minister Mu Wenyuan, first meets Bai Yan.

Since Zhu Sha was risen to the rank of Imperial Consort, the favour bestowed upon her is matchless and her power is unrivaled. Officials who accuse of her of anything before the emperor would in the end be stripped of their office or convicted to death. Emperor Jing gives himself over to indulgence and women and ignores the affairs of the state. The imperial court is filled with criticism that grows greater by the day, and the common folk label Zhu Sha as a treacherous concubine.

.....

7th year of Chongning:

4th month: Mu Qinghe encounters Bai Yan once again and states his aspirations to Bai Yan.

6th month: An uprising led by the common people occurs in the areas of the northern mountain ranges in protest of heavy taxation. Bai Yan takes advantage of this opportunity to rise in revolt and declare war against the government. Mu Qinghe leaves a note and departs his home to join Bai Yan's army. His father and elder brothers cut off all ties with him.

7th month: Bai Yan, with Mu Qinghe as his general, moves troops to the northern mountain ranges. The first city he attacks in the north is Tianlan. This becomes known as the Chongning Rebellion. Xie Wan, General of Tianlan, fights gruelingly with no reinforcements and dies in battle, refusing to surrender. Her head is hung on the city walls for three days by the second-in-command, Chu Qili, of the Bai Yan army. All thirteen members of the Xie family of Tianlan died with the fall of the city.

9th month: The Bai Yan army attacks cities and conquers land, advancing closer to the imperial capital with eay day. Emperor Jing frequently does not attend daily morning imperial court sessions.

11th month: Letters of communication are found in the manor of Right Prime Minister, Chu Jiuling between him and his brother, Chu Qili. Chu Jiuling is accused of treason. The entire Chu family is executed.

.....

8th year of Chongning:

1st month: The Bai Yan army descends upon the imperial capital, Tiansui. Teacher of the State, Wu Sheng singlehandedly holds off the army outside the capital for three days but after, disappears. Tiansui falls. Imperial Consort, Zhu Sha throws herself from the city walls to give her life up for her country. Bai Yan bestows death by poison to Emperor Jing, Rong Xi.

2nd month: Bai Yan ascends the throne and decrees the new imperial dynasty as Zhou with the era title as Yongchu.

On the day the capital fell, Su Jing mysteriously disappeared, Xie Qing commits suicide by setting himself on fire, and Gu Changning surrendered. Mo Li went into hiding and the people thought he had died.

.....

1st year of Yongchu:

4th month: Mu Qinghe surrenders his general's seal in exchange for an imperial promise of one hundred years of safety for the Mu family and departs out to sea. The Gu family returns to the capital, and Gu Changning reassumes his role of Imperial Historian.

5th month: The Official of Imperial Ceremony suggests the last emperor [Emperor Jing] of the Wei dynasty be bestowed the posthumous title, Huang. Emperor Yuan [Founding Emperor] of Zhou, Bai Yan agrees.

.....

10th year of Yongchu:

11th month: Mo Li enters the imperial palace to offer up a painting of the Imperial Consort of the former dynasty, then leaves.

12th month: Founding Emperor, Bai Yan dies. The various princes revolt.

History calls this the Yongchu Rebellion.

11th year of Yongchu:

9th month: The Prince of Qin, Bai Che leads the army to put down the rebellion.

12th month: He defeats the joint army of six princes on the plains outside Tianlan.

12th year of Yongchu:

1st month: Bai Che ascends the throne and declares his era title, Taiye. He is known as Emperor Wu of Zhou.

2nd month: Imperial wedding of Emperor Wu and Empress Yaoguang, Chu Luo and a royal decree of forgiveness of all crimes is issued. Thereupon, a sacrifice is offered at the ancestral temple and Bai Yan is honored as Founding Emperor.

[b] Imperial concubines have their own ranking. This is a fictional dynasty set within ancient China, but this wikipedia link provides some background on the ranking systems, which varied by dynasty.

[c] 冷宫 'Leng Gong'. Literally means "cold palace" and it is where imperial concubines or empress who have fallen out of the emperor's favour are sent.

风起天阑 Feng Qi Tian Lan [The Wind Rises Up at Tianlan]

This is one of my favourite songs. The lyrics create such a mournful story of a female general dying in battle rather than surrendering and the man she loves remembering that fateful day. The instrumentals conjure up the feeling of battle drums, despair that one feels in the brief times of silence, wind whistling through abandoned alleys. Simply brilliant. The MV I linked for this song actually tells the story in the lyrics. To explain the title a bit better: Tianlan is the name of the northern city that was the first one attacked by the rebel army, but Tianlan also means "the sky's edge." The "wind" in the title is calling up images of the sand swirling up over the battle, chaos breaking out. The chaos rises up and starts at the city of Tianlan, over at what seems like the sky's edge, and signals the

beginning of the end of an era and dynasty. (Four characters in Chinese and it takes me so many words to explain... I love the Chinese language.)

## 背景

.....崇宁七年七月，白炎军攻城，是为乱始。守将谢婉率众苦战，不得援。七月廿六，城破，婉力竭被擒，不肯降，为炎军梟首。八年春，炎夺王城天岁，鸩敬帝，清朝堂，废宫室。二月即位，定国号周，改元永初。

永初十年冬，周帝崩，朝野翻覆，诸王皆谋自立。时有乱军夜袭，见婉披发执枪于城上，肝胆俱裂，乃退。十一年，新帝彻平乱登基，改元太业。

太业后，城中始有谣歌传唱。歌曰：安危何所系，天阗谢将军。太业三年，城东设谢婉衣冠祠，祭拜者众，香火终年不绝。

——《天阗城志·谢婉传》

## Background:

In the seventh month of the seventh year of Chongning, the Bai Yan army attacks the city, initiating the rebellion. The general of the city troops, Xie Wan, leads the people in a desperate resistance, but they receive no aid. On the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month, the city falls and Xie Wan, exhausted from her efforts, is captured. Refusing to surrender, the Bai Yan army beheads her and hangs her head on the city walls. In the spring of the eighth year, Bai Yan gains control of the capital city, Tiansui, bestows poison to Emperor Jing, purges the imperial court, and deposes the imperial family. In the second month, he ascends the throne. The new dynasty is given the name Zhou and his era title is Yongchu.

In the tenth year of Yongchu, the emperor of Zhou dies. The imperial court is thrown into chaos, and the various princes all rise up to declare their independence. Rebel armies that laid assault in the middle of the night, though, would account that they saw Xie Wan, her hair falling over her shoulders, standing upon the city walls with spear in hand. Fear would strike into the soldiers' hearts, and they would retreat. In the eleventh year, the new emperor ascends the throne and changes the era title to Taiye.



From Taiye onward, a song starts to be sung within the city. This is what is said in the song: Where is safety to be found? With Tianlan's General Xie. In the third year of Taiye, a temple dedicated to Xie Wan is erected. Worshippers are many and the incense burns there without ceasing.

— excerpt from “The Records of Tianlan: Xie Wan”

[0:36] 火光凄厉地照亮夜 城破时天边正残月

The glow of fires somberly illuminates the night. That moment the city fell, a waning moon had hung in the sky.

那一眼你笑如昙花 转眼凋谢

In that one glimpse, I saw your smile like a blooming cactus orchid. But in an eye's blink, it had wilted away.

[0:52] 血色的风把旗撕裂 城头的灯终于熄灭

The blood-colored wind tears the flags. At last, the lanterns on the city walls have been extinguished.

看不到你头颅高悬 眼神轻蔑

I cannot see your head hanging high with eyes filled with contempt

[1:07] 焚成灰的蝴蝶 断了根的枝叶

A butterfly, burned to ashes. A branch, broken off from its roots.

挣脱眼眶前冻结的悲切

I struggle to free myself from the bitter coldness of intense grief that is before my eyes

鲜血流过长街 耳畔杀伐不歇

Blood flows along the streets. The sounds of fighting in my ears are unceasing

守护的城阙大雨中呜咽

The guarded watchtower seems to sob in the heavy rain

[1:22] 多年后史书页 还把这夜撰写

Years from now, the pages of the history books will have this night recorded

青石长阶 染尽生离死别

The long limestone streets tainted with scenes of parting through separation or death

耳闻的像终结 眼见的都毁灭

The sounds seem to have ceased. Everything before my eyes is destroyed

温柔的最决绝 坠落的曾摇曳

What once was gentle is the most resolute. What has fallen had once been free and unfettered.

[1:39] 恍然间已诀别 正褪色的长夜

In only an instant, we are separated in a final farewell in this long night that is fading away

破晓之前 洗去所有罪孽

Before dawn breaks forth, let all sins and wrongs be washed away

有人喊你名字 直到声嘶力竭

Someone shouts your name until voice is hoarse and strength is drained

若魂魄能知觉 黄泉下不忘却

If your soul is still conscious, then in the underworld, please do not forget

(interlude)

[2:32] 不记得阴晴或圆缺 我看过花开和花谢

I no longer remember whether the moons I've seen are overcast or clear, full or not. I have seen flowers bloom and flowers wilt away

渐渐地回忆起喜悦 与恨有别

Slowly, I recall that there is a difference between joy and hatred

王城的姓氏都改写 我还在这里守着夜

The ruling surname of the imperial city has been rewritten into the history books, yet here I am still guarding the night

等什么从灰烬里面 破茧成蝶

Waiting for something to rise up from the ashes and break forth, like a butterfly from its chrysalis

[3:03] 是命运在轮回 熟悉得像幻觉

Fate seems to have come full cycle. Everything so familiar, like an illusion.

火烧破天空星辰都倾泻

The flames burn again against the sky. The stars are crashing down.

马蹄踏碎落叶 四方边角不绝

Horses trample the fallen leaves unendingly in all directions.

血滚落尘土像那瞬艳烈

Blood pours out onto the dusty ground, bright, just like that moment

[3:19] 太遥远的岁月 看不清的眉睫

Those days that are so distant now, those brows and eyelashes that I can no longer clearly see

回忆尽头 风声依旧凛冽

I have reached the end of my memories, yet the wind is still biting cold as before

埋下的骨和血 早沉没在黑夜

The bones and blood that are buried were swallowed away into the dark night long ago

逝去的已冰冷 飘零的未了结

The one who has passed away has grown ice cold. The one who has been drifting aimlessly still cannot settle down.

[3:35] 记得城中日月 蝉鸣后又初雪

Remember the sun and moon we saw in the city, from when the cicadas sang to the first snow

屋檐细雨 停在初见季节

This scene – the eaves of the roof with a light drizzle of rain – has been paused in that season when we first met

用最平淡话语 藏住旧日誓约

Using the simplest words to harbour the vows of yesterday

春风绿过柳叶 你曾笑得无邪

There, in that spring breeze, in the green of the willow leaves, you had laughed so purely and innocently

[4:11] 太遥远的岁月 看不清的眉睫

Those days that are so distant now, those brows and eyelashes that I can no longer clearly see

回忆尽头 风声依旧凛冽

I have reached the end of my memories, yet the wind is still biting cold as before

埋下的骨和血 早沉没在黑夜

The bones and blood that are buried had been swallowed away into the dark night long ago

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The one who has passed away has grown ice cold. The one who has been drifting aimlessly still cannot settle down.

[4:27] 记得城中日月 蝉鸣后又初雪

Remember the sun and moon we saw in the city, from when the cicadas sang to the first snow

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春风绿过柳叶 你曾笑得无邪

There, in that spring breeze, in the green of the willow leaves, you had laughed so purely and innocently

[4:43] 逆风穿越荒野 来不及去告别

Against the wind, I cross through the wilderness, not even having a chance to bid my farewells

破晓之前 忘记所有胆怯

Before dawn has broken, I have forgotten all my fears

从此用我双眼 替你看这世界

From this day forth, my eyes shall view this world for you

云万里山千叠 天尽头城不夜

Thousands of miles of clouds. Mountain ranges formed by thousands of folds. The farthest reaches of the sky. Cities that never sleep.

[4:59] 依稀是旧时节 城门上下弦月

This vaguely resembles a time in the past. A moon in its last quarter hangs above the city gates.

白色身影 夜色如水清冽

A white figure is there. The light of night is limpid like water

借我一刻光阴 把你看得真切

And lends me just a moment of time so I can have one clear view of you again

身后花开成雪 月光里不凋谢

Behind you, the blossoms seem like snow and, in the moonlight, will never wither away

山河永慕 Shan He Yong Mu [A Country Forever to be Admired]

A song of a young man who would leave and go against his family to pursue what he believed to be right. This young general, his heart filled with fervour, honour, brotherhood, and friendship, fought for his country while at the same time, endured the loneliness of having to ensure that his friend, the emperor, would not become jealous of his accomplishments and turn any suspicions onto him. So when the dust settled, he bowed out of the limelight to protect his family. The title of the song can mean a country forever to be admired or a country where “Mu (i.e. Mu Qinghe) has forever left his mark. This is not the typical ancient-style music and the rock style was kind of off-putting at first to me. But, the more I listen to it, the more I find that this fast-paced tempo captures the passion in Mu Qinghe’s heart so well.

## 文案

慕清和者，左相慕文远次子，兵部侍郎慕清平之弟也。其母早逝，父有贤名，兄有将才，唯和自幼顽劣。崇宁四年五月，天阑太守谢怀瑾长女婉以殿前武试第一请任天阑守将，和见之，心有所悟。七月，于天岁城郊遇白炎，一见倾盖。越三年，敬帝宠昭贵妃，割剥无度，朝野怨声载道。七年四月，和再遇白炎，述己志。六月，北岭民变，白炎借势起兵。和留书离家，投白炎麾下。父兄与之绝。

七年七月，白炎以和为将，兵发北岭，攻北方第一城天阑，是为崇宁之乱。八年元月，炎军临帝都天岁。国师巫晟以一人之力阻其于帝都外三日，后不知所踪。昭贵妃朱砂堕城殉国。白炎鸩敬帝容熙。城陷之日，京中王公多死伤，唯慕氏为和力护不失。八年二月，白炎即位，定国号周，改元永初。

.....和幼与右相褚九龄么女褚素心有婚约。崇宁七年十一月，褚九龄被指通敌，褚氏满门抄斩，褚素心亦在其列。.....

永初元年四月，和以将印换取慕氏平安百年之帝王承诺，自此远走海外。太业后，犹有人言其踪迹，曰：战船结队，只身海上。

——《卫史·慕清和列传》

Mu Qinghe; second son of the Left Prime Minister, Mu Wenyan; younger brother of Mu Qingping, the Assistant Minister of the Ministry of War. His mother had died early, his father has an honorable reputation, and his brother is a talented military strategist. Only Mu Qinghe has

been stubborn and disobedient since childhood. In the fifth month of the fourth year of Chongning, the eldest daughter, Xie Wan, of Xie Huaijin, the governor of Tianlan, ascends to the position of General of Tianlan after taking first place in the martial arts demonstration held before the emperor. When Mu Qinghe sees this, he realizes something. In the seventh month, he encounters Bai Yan in the outskirts outside of the capital city, Tiansui, and the two feel like old friends even at this first meeting. For three years, Emperor Jing dotes on his imperial consort and excessively taxes the common folk. Cries of complaint rise up. In the fourth month of the seventh year, Mu Qinghe has another discussion with Bai Yan and states his aspirations. In the sixth month, an uprising led by the civilians of the northern mountain ranges occurs. Bai Yan takes advantage of this opportunity to rise in revolt and declare war against the government. Mu Qinghe leaves a note and departs his home to join Bai Yan's army. His father and elder brothers cut off all ties with him.

Seventh month of the seventh year, Bai Yan, with Mu Qinghe as his general, moves troops to the northern mountain ranges. The first city he attacks in the north is Tianlan. This becomes known as the Chongning Rebellion. First month of the eighth year, the Bai Yan army descends upon the imperial capital, Tiansui. Teacher of the State, Wu Sheng singlehandedly holds off the army outside the capital for three days but after, disappears. Tiansui falls. Imperial Consort, Zhu Sha throws herself from the city walls to give her life up for her country. Bai Yan bestows death by poison to Emperor Jing, Rong Xi. On the day the capital city is captured, many princes, dukes, and aristocrats in the city were injured or amongst the dead, with the exception of the Mu family, who, under Mu Qinghe's protection, was left unharmed. Second month of the eighth year, Bai Yan ascends the throne and decrees the new imperial dynasty as Zhou with the era title as Yongchu.

..... When Mu Qinghe was young, he and Chu Suxin, the youngest daughter of Chu Jiuling, the Right Prime Minister, had been betrothed in marriage. In the eleventh month of the seventh year of Chongning, Chu Jiuling is accused of treason, and the entire Chu family is executed, including Chu Suxin. ....

In the fourth month of the first year of Yongchu, Mu Qinghe surrenders his general's seal in exchange for an imperial promise of one hundred years of safety for the Mu family and departs out to sea. In the Taiye era, there were people who had reports of his whereabouts, saying a fleet of battleships was assembled, and he traveled the seas alone [no family, close ones].

— excerpt from “The Historical Records of the Wei Dynasty: Biography of Mu Qinghe”

[0:39] 是涅槃那瞬的颜色 谁举旗比烈火炙热

In that moment of nirvana, whose flag raised high is even more searing than fire?

抬眼间已换了山河

We raise our eyes, and the land has changed to a different ruler

[0:48] 为你唱三百夜情歌 尘与土飞扬成过客

For you, I sing 300 nights of love songs. Dust and dirt swirl in the air, but they are only a moment in passing

远望时有没有不舍

When you looked off into the distance, were you willing to let go?

[0:56] 崇宁七年春 天正惊蛰

In the spring of the seventh year of Chongning, in the season when the insects first awaken

白虎随行黑鸦在侧 暗月下逆旅者

With criticism and hope accompanying him, the traveller stands beneath the dark moon

北斗星知道 前路曲折

The big dipper knows that the road lying before him will be winding

万人阵前一杯说奈何 还得乡有几个

I stand before tens of thousands of people with cup in hand, but how



many of them shall return alive to their homelands?

[1:21] 苍龙负图山巍峨 九十九曲水清澈

The Cang Long Fu Tu Mountains are majestic; the ninety-nine winding streams are clear

问着荣耀背后 荆棘血路 值不值得

You asked me, behind the outward glory, is it worth the thorny, bloody path that needs to be taken?

[1:39] 乱世慷慨我行歌 千万人中有相和

In these troubled times, I fervently weep as I walk my journey. Amid the millions of people, there is one walking in step with me.

所有人间烟火 悲欢离合 日月星辰会记得

All the daily things of life – joys and sorrows, partings and reunions – are not forgotten by the sun, moon, or stars

(interlude)

[2:15] 是指间渐冷的誓约 谁紧握比生命殷切

The vow still on the edge of the fingertips is gradually going cold, but who still clings tightly to them more earnestly than life?

不放开到星火熄灭

I will not let go until the stars have extinguished

[2:24] 为你守十二夜圆缺 青烟里隔了阴阳界

For you, I kept watch for twelve nights, where the moon's phases varied. Through the wisps of smoke, we are separated by life and death

剩那年初见时一瞥

All that is left is the memory of that year, that first glance when we first met one another

[2:32] 长夜将尽 黎明似铁

The long night is about to come to an end. Daybreak is close

来也凜冽去也孤绝 动如参商不须别

You and I came in the piercing cold and left in loneliness. We are forever separated; no need to say farewell

永安钟清正 空响长街

The bell of eternal peace sounds honourably and righteously, echoing through the street

昔日少年依旧思无邪 一回望一拜谢

That youthful boy of the past is still pure and blameless as before. He turns to take one last look back, give one more expression of gratitude

[2:58] 苍龙负图山千叠 九十九曲水不歇

The Cang Long Fu Tu Mountains undulate, as if folded thousands of times. The water of the ninety-nine winding streams are never ending

正是朝阳万里 点燃城阙 远大这时节

In that moment, when the morning sun shines upon ten thousands of miles, I light the fire of the watchtower. Such broad ambitions in this season.

[3:15] 一片柳叶吹成雪 舟中温柔海上月

A single willow leaf drifts in the air. It turns to snow. The gentle moonlight of the open sea shines down into the boat.

记得人间最好 一笑照夜 梦里失约歌里借

I remember, the most beautiful thing in the world is a smile that lights up the night. In our dreams, we missed each other. In the song, I will borrow a chance, then (to again be with you).

[3:32] 苍龙负图山千叠 九十九曲水不歇

The Cang Long Fu Tu Mountains undulate, as if folded thousands of times. The water of the ninety-nine winding streams are never ending

正是朝阳万里 点燃城阙 远大这时节

In that moment, when the morning sun shines upon ten thousands of

miles, I light the fire of the watchtower. Such broad ambitions in this season.

[3:50] 一片柳叶吹成雪 舟中温柔海上月

A single willow leaf drifts in the air. It turns to snow. The gentle moonlight of the open sea shines down into the boat.

记得人间最好 一笑照夜 梦里失约歌里借

I remember, the most beautiful thing in the world is a smile that lights up the night. In our dreams, we missed each other. In the song, I will borrow a chance, then (to again be with you).

倾尽天下 Qing Jin Tian Xia [Overturn the World]

Translation will come next update, but why was everyone so sure the next song would be this one? This particular album was very popular, and ancient-style music fans should be quite familiar with it and the backstory within it. Qing Jin Tian Xia is the second last song and the climax of the album. It is about Bai Yan, the man who overthrew the previous dynasty and “overturned the world,” and now, after the world has changed hands and he is emperor, what are his thoughts, what is his story? This is the logical concluding song to the medley. Also, the 倾 ‘qing’ in the title is the same as in 倾国倾城 “beauty/ability that causes the downfall of a country/city” (and what I have simplified as “unrivalled allure”), so what could be more suitable for Toupai to sing?

# Chapter 34: Floured Beef Steamed in a Cup (4)

Amidst the waves of comments pouring onto the screen, the background music finally switched over to “Overturn the World.”

[[[https://youtu.be/qofvz9j\\_afU](https://youtu.be/qofvz9j_afU)]]

When he opened his mouth, the first word he sang was already the chorus of the song:

[1:07] “This picture of a blood-stained landscape, how can it even compare to the vermilion mark between your brows?

I have overturned the world, but so what? In the end, it is no more than a fleeting moment of opulence --“

Blood has stained the land, yet in the end, it cannot even compare to a single backwards glance cast by the beautiful maiden.

The world. The beautiful maiden.

The beautiful maiden. The world.

His high notes coupled with the accompaniment easily brought out the feeling of an emperor’s aura, one of indifference to the entire world as he looked down upon the country’s thousands of miles.

Gu Sheng did not even dare breathe as she listened to him. All of her senses were captivated and led by his voice, and she instantly fell into this sorrowful story. Soon, his one voice joined together with the other three.

Qiang Qing Ci’s tenor voice combined with Jian Jian’s clear voice, plus the other two singer’s harmonies...

Truly too perfect!

These four people. These four gorgeous voices. That was truly what it meant to overturn the world.

The song was nearing its end. At the last part of the song, all of the music and voices unexpectedly ceased.

Gu Sheng was taken aback for two seconds.

And then suddenly, the background music started again.

The sudden silence and then sudden emotionally charged accompaniment captured everyone's heart.

His voice finally appeared again to give this song, "Overturn the World" its perfect conclusion:

[4:02] "In my dreams, standing upstairs, under the moonlight, is you, your face still the same as before.

Brushing the snow off our garments, we stand side by side and look upon the vast world -- "

Stand side by side and look upon... the vast world.

She suddenly remembered that day in the recording studio when he had stood beside her. Those eyes, black like they had been dabbed with ink, and so beautiful they took your breath away...

"I can't take it anymore." Die Die turned on her microphone again, her voice charged with excitement. "Dou Bing, let's trade. My association's Wu Meng for your Toupai? Wait, no, let's throw in Wwwwk too. Exchange, two for one, how about that?"

"That's a little too unfair to you," Dou Dou Dou Bing burst out in a giggle. "Die Die, why don't you just quit your association and come join Wanmei?"

Alright...

Even she was used to it by now.

Toupai was always the subject of all the jesting and teasing.

.....

All throughout this exchange, Qiang Qing Ci had not made a sound, and even his microphone indicator was off. Gu Sheng noticed this and found it rather odd... She sent a private message over to him: Busy?

Qiang Qing Ci: Mm. Have to get offline soon. Something's come up.

Sheng Sheng Man: Hurry off then ^^

Qiang Qing Ci: Go have fun yourself for a while. When I'm done, I'll give you a phone call.

Phone call...

(◕v◕) Um, phone call, right... K, she had only been his girlfriend for a few hours, so she still needed to work on her ability to react. Gu Sheng quickly typed a smiley face.

Then she saw Toupai leave a message in the public comment screen: I have something to do and have to leave first. Everyone, I'll say my goodbye now.

The people on the microphones were at the peak of their euphoria with their teasing when the subject of their jokes ran off.

"That Toupai really goes and overturns the world with his one song... then doesn't take responsibility for what he did and just takes off," Fu Sheng Wu Meng immediately laughed.

Luckily, with so many "beauties" present tonight, they had no problems taking care of the rest of the late night event.

Seeing that he had already left, Gu Sheng also exited the room.

She had nothing to do, and before she knew it, she had logged onto Weibo. Since that time she had expressed that she was "so happy" and had been virtually surrounded by a mass of onlookers, she had been psychologically traumatized and had not posted anything else on Weibo...

She recalled that when she had first started getting more familiar with Toupai, she had also worried about being badmouthed or having her details dug up. But, afterwards, she had thought it through. She did not often show up in the 2-D world, and on the rare occasion she did, it was only to forward the songs she had composed or sung, so there should not be much for people to bash... And anyways, the ancient-style music circle had started up relatively late and was rather small, so even if there was gossip, it usually focused on the well-known celebrities. She was just an insignificant composer and singer and should not even have a turn in the

limelight.

.....

She should be... safe for now, right? T.T.....

That night, she slept all the way through until past six o'clock, when she groggily seemed to hear the alert of her mobile phone indicating a WeChat message, but yet, it also seemed like it was just a dream. When she finally saw the message later in the morning, she discovered it was from Mo Qingcheng: Finished up, but it's too late now so I won't call you. Sweet dreams, or maybe I should say, good morning.

Her eyes were still only half-open as she read the text message.

She stared at it for a while, then wordlessly rubbed her cheek against her pillow while grinning foolishly.

Right at that very minute, Geng Xiaoxing, who was rubbing her wet hair with a towel, happened to be walking by down below her bed and saw her. Geng Xiaoxing eyes glimmered as she gazed at her and immediately exposed her actions. "Oh my god. Are you yearning for love?... Oh wait, no, you're yearning for Toupai..."

A pillow was very successfully tossed down from above.

She hugged another pillow and climbed out of her bed, unable to contain her good mood.

She could not say why, but anyways, she just wanted to smile... The sun today was so round and so beautiful, ah...

Since she and Geng Xiaoxing were heading straight into post-graduate studies without doing an internship this term, this semester, the teachers in their faculty of course took advantage of this to exploit their time. They started the task of organizing the library for the faculty. The dean of the faculty had personally brought in sponsorship for this library, and the plans were for it to officially open next semester. As a result, this semester, the work mainly involved organizing and cataloging, and the people present were all from within the faculty.

So everyday, the two of them would be on the top floor of their faculty's building with four other male students who were also heading directly into post-graduate studies. Breaking off into groups of two, they would each hold an iPad and verify the books on each row of the bookshelves.

A lifestyle of working when the sun rose and then resting when the sun set.

Mo Qingcheng was already out in the working world, and she was still in school. It seemed there had been no real change resulting from the change in their relationship.

But... it had only been three days. What could change yet?...

Oh no. Gu Sheng, your mind wandered again.

T.T.....

She stole a glance at Geng Xiaoxing, wanting to ask where she had counted to just now. Apparently, though, that person was not focusing on the task either, for she was holding a book in her hands and browsing through it with great interest. "Our faculty is so open. There's even a young adult fiction section..." Geng Xiaoxing pursed her lips as she stood on the stepladder, her eyes fixed on the book. "I read the online version of this, but this published one here has a newly added epilogue. Wait for me. I'm just going to read it and then we can go have lunch when I'm done."

She was so hungry she could faint but that person on the ladder still wanted to read a romance novel's new epilogue...

She almost wanted to cry, but no tears would come out. Exiting out of the inventory document, she used the iPad and logged into her QQ account, wanting to check her email and calculate how many song compositions and recordings she still owed. To her surprise, however, the first thing she saw was Zou Diao'er's chat message: Little Golden Master, are you still okay?

What a strange way to ask...

"Pretty good. Why? Did you want to change shifts with me on YY?"



“ㄋ (ノ ▽ ヲ) ㄋ I noticed you haven't been posting on Weibo, so I thought you saw those posts and were affected by them.”

“Huh?”

“ㄋ (ノ ▽ ヲ) ㄋ You know, only the tall tree attracts the wind. As Toupai's little golden master, it wouldn't be normal if you weren't thrown into the wok and fried a few times. So... hang in there, Sheng Sheng Man.”

“Huh?” She had a bad feeling about this.

Sure enough, Zou Diao'er quickly copied and pasted a critique from somewhere and sent it over.

It was completely directed at some songs she had arranged when she first entered the entertainment circle. The choice of words was vicious, and she was criticized to the point where there was nothing good to say... It was very professional, so professional it made her blush with shame. But the mocking and ridicule that could be read into the words were also very obvious. Sure enough... she did feel affected by this, didn't she?

Gu Shen leaned against the side of a bookshelf and watched as Zou Diao'er kept pasting critique after critique for her.

This particular entertainment circle was small, and songs that became famous usually involved a strong line-up of people, from the song arranger to the singer. Therefore, songs she had composed or arranged in the past had, at most, been forwarded two or three hundred times only, and that was already considered a great accomplishment. So if a song was not become popular, naturally, no one would have analyzed and dissected it so professionally like this...

To have her own children thrown into the frying pan like this. It was impossible to not feel upset.

She had been reading in silence and had not noticed when Geng Xiaoxing had come down off the stepladder.

“What's wrong? Not feeling well?” Geng Xiaoxing noticed that her complexion suddenly did not look very good.

“Huh?” Gu Sheng shutdown her QQ and exhaled lightly. “Nothing. Just hungry.”

Let’s eat, let’s eat.

A full stomach can solve all worries!

She looked over at Geng Xiaoxing. “Lunch is on you. So hungry. I want to eat a pot of ground pork vermicelli and soup!”

“Huh?” Geng Xiaoxing completely could not keep up with the pace of her thinking. She made what she believed to be the most reasonable guess for what was wrong. “Did you and Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen have an argument?”

“.....” Gu Sheng wanted to say, they had not even seen each other, what could they possibly argue about? But right then, the mobile phone in her pocket started ringing.

It was Toupai...

She made a shushing noise, then took her phone, ran to the window, and answered the call.

‘I’m home now.’ Mo Qingcheng’s voice was not very clear. In fact, it sounded very raspy. “I might need to sleep a little longer. Probably two hours or so and then I’ll call you again.”

“You’re... sick?” Listening to this voice of his inexplicably made her heart twinge.

“Mm.” His voice was fading in and out, like his phone was being moved around. “Sore throat. Might have a bit of a fever.”

“Fever? Have you checked your temperature?”

“Mm.”

And then... quiet.

Those two “mm” were filled with exhaustion, and hearing them in her ears caused a slight sense of worry as well as a slight ache in her heart... And also a slight bit of restlessness and anxiety. She did not dare continue

questioning him for fear his throat would hurt, but she also did not know how high of a fever was “a bit of a fever”... Seriously, shouldn’t doctors take even better care of themselves? T.T.....

“I’ll sleep for a couple of hours and then call you.” Mo Qingcheng’s voice was honestly very hoarse, raspily scraping her heart away, yet he still did not forget to tell her again when he would contact her.

She felt like... her heart was going to be ground away into tiny little pieces soon...

They hung up their call.

Geng Xiaoxing walked over to her and saw that her face had changed from the forlorn and dejected expression a moment ago to one that now looked... like anxiousness? They really got in an argument? She did not even get a chance to open her mouth to ask, though, before Gu Sheng had already stuffed the iPad to her. “I’m not coming back this afternoon. If the teacher asks, just say I have a stomachache...”

“Huh?”

Gu Sheng had already dashed off to the elevator with her mobile phone in hand.

“Didn’t you say... you wanted to eat... ground pork vermicelli in soup? .....

Geng Xiaoxing’s mind could not move at the same rate as hers at all and could only watch as she disappeared out of sight...

\*

Additional Comments:

If you didn’t make it to the end of my looooong post last time, here is the explanation I wrote of why everyone knew 倾尽天下 Qing Jin Tian Xia [Overturn the World] was the next song.

This particular album was very popular, and ancient-style music fans should be quite familiar with it and the backstory within it. Qing Jin Tian Xia is the second last song and the climax of the album. It is about Bai

Yan, the man who overthrew the previous dynasty and “overturned the world,” and now, after the world has changed hands and he is emperor, what are his thoughts, what is his story? This is the logical concluding song to the medley. Also, the 倾 ‘qing’ in the title is the same as in 倾国倾城 “beauty/ability that causes the downfall of a country/city” (and what I have simplified as “unrivalled allure”), so what could be more suitable for Toupai to sing?

There are actually some good fan made MVs out there for this song that tell the sad love story of Bai Yan. I just couldn’t find one that didn’t have some sort of fan-inserted dialogue to post in the main part of the translation. I particularly like this one, with Hu Ge and Liu Yi Fei or this one, with Huang Xiao Ming and Liu Yi Fei.

This lyrics of the song are very poetic. It uses short, poetic phrases that seem to just state a fact, and you need to interpret what happened. There is very little use of pronouns like you, I, she, etc. so one must interpret who is speaking, who is doing a certain action, etc. I suspect this was deliberate. This song is about Bai Yan, the person who “overturned the world” and became the new emperor. If you read the last line of the background synopsis, though, most of his personal life was a mystery. Like the unclear view of the painting through the sheer curtains of the pagoda, we only get an unclear view of his personal life, motivations, love... but much of it still remains a mystery. I tried at first to translate similarly, but unconsciously, I’ve thrown in some personal interpretation in there. ;)

And lastly, a note about the title 倾尽天下. This can be translated as “the world has been completely overturned,” but it can also mean, to “throw in/risk the entire world” for something/someone. Let’s see how you interpret the title after you read the lyrics.

周帝白炎死在称帝十载后的一个雪夜。

这个草莽出身的皇帝不喜奢华，逼宫夺位后便废弃了前朝敬帝所建的华美宫室，而每夜宿在帝宫内的九龙塔，死时亦盘膝在塔顶石室几案前的蒲团上，正对着壁上一幅画像

倘有历过前朝的宫女在，定会认出，那画上颜色无双的女子，正是前朝敬帝所封的最后一位贵妃。

原来在倾国的十年之后，白炎终究追随那人而去。他身后并未留下只言片语。于是所有关于周朝开国皇帝的谜团，都与那悬于九重宝塔之上、隐在七重纱幕背后的画像，一并被掩埋进厚重的史书里

Background:

The emperor of Zhou, Bai Yan died on a snowy night, ten years after declaring his reign as emperor.

This emperor, who had risen up from amongst the common folk, did not bask in extravagance. After forcing the previous emperor to abdicate and claiming the throne for himself, he abandoned the magnificent palace of Emperor Jing of the previous dynasty. Instead, every night, he retired to sleep in the Nine Dragon Pagoda that was on the imperial palace grounds. Even when he died, he was in one of the stone chambers of the pagoda, sitting cross-legged on the rush cushion before a long table, facing a portrait painting on the wall.

Maidservants who had also served in the palace in the previous dynasty all would be able to recognize that the woman of unrivalled beauty in the painting was the last woman to be bestowed the title of Imperial Consort by the previous dynasty's Emperor Jing.

As it turns out, ten years after the country changed hands, Bai Yan finally follows that person into eternity. He did not leave behind any words. And so, all the mysteries regarding the founding emperor of the Zhou Dynasty were buried, along with that portrait, hanging behind the sheer curtains on the top level of the Nine Dragon Pagoda, within the thick history books.

[0:39] 刀戟声共丝竹沙哑

The clash of sabres and halberds can be heard and it silences the musical instruments

谁带你看城外厮杀

Who brought you to view the fighting outside the city?

七重纱衣 血溅了白纱

A silk garment of seven layers. Blood splattered on the sheer, white silk.

兵临城下六军不发

An army at the city gates, but none of its six regiments have moved forward yet

谁知再见已是 生死无话

Who knew that the next meeting would be one of a separation by life and death, and no words could be said?

[0:54] 当时缠过红线千匝

At the time, bound together by a red thread wounded thousands of times

一念之差为人作嫁(但河图唱的是“作为人嫁”)

But one ill-considered decision caused (your) marriage to someone else

那道伤疤 谁的旧伤疤

That old wound. Whose old wound is it?

还能不动声色饮茶

To still be able to outwardly remain calm and collected and sip tea

踏碎这一场 盛世烟花

Trampling over this flourishing era of prosperity

[1:07] 血染江山的画

This picture of a blood-stained landscape

怎敌你眉间 一点朱砂

How can it even compare to the vermilion mark between your brows?

覆了天下也罢

(I have) overturned the world, but so what?

始终不过 一场繁华

In the end, it is merely a fleeting moment of opulence

碧血染就桃花

Blood taints the peach blossoms

只想再见你泪如雨下

Wanting only to see you again. Tears fall like rain

听刀剑暗哑

The sound of blades is dying down

高楼奄奄一息 倾塌

The tall pavilions are on the verge of collapse

[1:38] 是说一生命犯桃花

It was said, "a life of ill-fated romantic entanglements"

谁为你算的那一卦

Who made this fortune prediction?

最是无瑕风流不假

Indeed, once a youth flawless as jade, suave and romantic

画楼西畔 反弹琵琶

In the pavilion for paintings beside the western shore, there was a dance to the tune of the pipa

暖风处处 谁心猿意马

The gentle warm breeze was everywhere. The heart felt fanciful and restless

[1:52] 色授魂与颠倒容华

Love expressed through the eyes. Such beauty that could turn the world upside down

兀自不肯相对照蜡

Yet, in the candlelight, unwilling to look at each other in the mirror

说爱折花 不爱青梅竹马

(You said you) Loved to pick flowers and did not like green plums and hobbyhorse[a]

到头来算的那一卦

Ultimately, that fortune prediction came true

终是为你 覆了天下

For you, I overturned the world

[2:05] 明月照亮天涯

The bright moon illuminates the horizons of the earth

最后谁又得到了蒹葭

In the end, who really got to have the maiden?

江山嘶鸣战马

A country filled with the whinnying of battle horses

怀抱中那寂静的喧哗

But in (my) embrace is only the sound of silence

风过天地肃杀

The wind blows over a land covered with war and killing

容华谢后 君临天下

After beauty [maiden] has faded away, an emperor overlooks the world

登上九重宝塔

Stepping up into the pagoda of nine levels

看一夜流星飒沓

To stare up for a night at a sky filled with meteors

[3:04] 回到那一刹那

My thoughts have been brought back again to that moment

岁月无声也让人害怕



The noiseless passage of years is frightening

枯藤长出枝桠

Even withered vines have grown new branches

原来时光已翩然轻擦

It turns out, time has lightly brushed past us and flown quickly by

[3:19] 梦中楼上月下

In my dreams, standing up at the top of the pavilion, under the  
moonlight

站着眉目依旧的你啊

Is you, your face still the same as before

拂去衣上雪花

Brushing off the snowflakes on our garments

并肩看 天地浩大

We stand side by side and look upon the vast world.

[3:33] 回到那一刹那

My thoughts have been brought back again to that moment

岁月无声也让人害怕

The noiseless passage of years is frightening

枯藤长出枝桠

Even withered vines have grown new branches

原来时光已翩然轻擦

It turns out, time has lightly brushed past us and flown quickly by

[3:48] 梦中楼上月下

In my dreams, standing up at the top of the pavilion, under the  
moonlight

站着眉目依旧的你啊

Is you, your face still the same as before

拂去衣上雪花

Brushing off the snowflakes on our garments

并肩看 天地浩大

We stand side by side and look upon the vast world.

[4:02] 梦中楼上月下

In my dreams, standing up at the top of the pavilion, under the  
moonlight

站着眉目依旧的你啊

Is you, your face still the same as before

拂去衣上雪花

Brushing off the snowflakes on our garments

并肩看 天地浩大

We stand side by side and look upon the vast world.

[a] 青梅竹马. A Chinese idiom in which the green plums and hobbyhorse represent a boy and girl who have known each other since the innocent times of childhood. Often used to describe childhood sweethearts. This entire line has multiple interpretations on the Chinese forums. One interpretation is, after staring lovingly at each other, they shyly are unwilling to look at each other in the mirror and then, she tells him, she'd rather "pick flowers" (she believe in love at first sight, i.e. she fell in love with him) than have "green plums and hobbyhorse" (the stereotypical childhood sweetheart type of love). Another possible interpretation is, they once stared lovingly at each other, but something happened through the passage of time, and they could no longer even look at each through the mirror. She declares to him, she is going to "pick flowers" (she has fallen in love with someone else) rather than have her "green plums and hobbyhorse" (i.e. him).

# Chapter 35: Floured Beef Steamed in a Cup (5)

Only half an hour was needed for her to arrive outside the ground level of Toupai's apartment building.

She had reckoned that Jue Mei needed to work, and if Mo Qingcheng was alone in his room with a high fever that would not break, he would definitely need someone to take care of him. However, now that she had actually arrived here, she started to waver... She looked up towards the twenty-fourth floor, wondering how she would get up there. He should be sleeping now, right? He was fevering and probably not too alert. Would it be okay if she woke him up when he was like this?...

"Little lass, what is the matter?" asked a white-haired old lady carrying two bags stuffed with groceries. She set the bags down by her feet and felt for her key. "Did you forget your key?"

"Huh? No... My boyfriend is sleeping right now, and I..."

I was actually just wondering if I should wake him up to open the door for me...

The old lady smiled and opened the door. "Come in first."

So just like that, she got in through the door. She helped the old lady carry her bags, and to her surprise, it turned out they were both going to the twenty-fourth floor. She recalled that the last time she came, she had sighed over what a nice layout this place had. Each floor only had two units... So, this old lady should be... Toupai's neighbor across the hall?

Only now, while she was carrying these bags of laundry detergent – liquid or powder or something – did she suddenly think about this. The old lady smiled at her, "What a coincidence. Those young fellows across the hall, whose girlfriend are you?"

"I, ah... am..."

Her palms felt as if they were heating up, and she sensed this kindly

gaze was looking her over interestedly. What was going on T.T?..... How come it felt like she had just met a parent or guardian and not just a neighbor? Sure enough, most elderly people were extremely cordial and nosy...

“Don’t say it. Let me guess.”

o( ͡ ▯ ͡ )o Respected elder, just don’t guess...

“Is it that young doctor? The one who does not really like to talk?”

“Mm...” Doesn’t like to talk?

He was a voice actor, a profession that relied on speaking T.T .....

“Doctor’s are good. Having a doctor in the house benefits the entire family... Oh, it seems I’m being too much of a realist with what I’m saying. That child is so serious. I took my grandson to the hospital and ran into him once. That was the first time I saw him speak a little bit more. He was scolding two parents. Those two were a young mom and dad, and they had fiery tempers. They were yelling at the nurses, saying their technique was poor, that at other hospitals, they were able to get the scalp IV in one try, but here, they could not even find a vein... They were yelling so loudly they scared my grandson. And they had rolled up their sleeves, all ready to hit the nurses..... Ah... You know, the doctor-patient relations nowadays... The other day I saw on the news...”

The old woman’s topic drifted and drifted some more until it was far off from where it had originally been.

Gu Sheng was dying of curiosity over what she had heard and hurriedly pulled her back on topic. “And then? What did he say to them?”

“Oh, right. Your Little Mo, he asked, did the child have the IV in his scalp for four or five days already? Those two parents were not happy to answer, eh, and were still shouting. They said, yes, it had been five days already, and this was the first time they had such a problem. Little Mo then said, it had been so many days already, so the vein itself couldn’t handle it anymore. He told them to go and cut some raw potato slices and put it on the insertion site of the needle. That would help the vein heal

faster..... I listened very carefully and even tried it on my grandson. It really works...”

So, he was actually... a pediatrician?

The elevator door opened. They had arrived at the twenty-fourth floor.

The old lady finally got to keenly watch her as she stood before the door and looked her over several times more in a kindly way before cheerfully stepping in her own door. Gu Sheng breathed out in relief. In that empty hallway, she stood there in front of the door and hesitated for a while. She glanced at her watch. The second hand was ticking and ticking away, and soon her heartbeat fell into pace with it.

That beat made a person feel so tense, aaah...

Exhaling gently, she finally pressed the doorbell. She had only been his girlfriend for three days... and it was only the second time seeing him since then... and she was here at his home again. What kind of luck was this? ...

She waited quietly for a little while. No sound could be heard.

Mo Qingcheng, you didn't pass out from your fever, did you?

She pressed the doorbell again, her anxiety escalating bit by bit and overshadowing that slight nervous embarrassment from a moment ago.

Still... no sound could be heard...

He didn't really faint, did he?!

Her heart was in her throat. Suddenly, the door opened.

It was apparent the person before her was not fully awake. He was dressed in only a white t-shirt and jogging pants, and, with one hand on the doorframe, he looked down at her. His eyes were only half-open, as if he had not quite processed what was going on. She, too, was given a shock and could only raise her head to look up at him. Hence, the two of them stood there, he looking at her and she looking at him, both of them not expecting this.

His lips pursed together in a smile and, all of a sudden, he chuckled.

“Come in first.”

This time, his voice was truly thoroughly hoarse. He turned around and slowly headed back in the direction of his own room. Gu Sheng hurriedly shut the door and changed into a pair of slippers. When she turned around, he had already entered his room.

Good thing... the door was open.

Stepping into his room, she saw him sitting on the edge of the bed. He ripped open a packet of medical alcohol swab, used it to wipe down a body temperature thermometer, and then stuffed the thermometer into his mouth before finally raising his head to look at her. The room's curtains had been drawn closed, and it was dim inside. It was apparent that he really had been sleeping and she had woken him.

She walked over and sat on the small sofa beside his bed. “Feeling really... unwell? Do you need to go to the hospital?”

His brows creased together. He shook his head.

She could see the stray hairs in front of his forehead were damp. He should have sweated quite a bit. Why did the thermometer in his mouth seem almost like a lollipop he was sucking on?

“I’ll pour a cup of warm water for you? Hurry,” she pointed at the bed and instructed, “and lie down.”

Otherwise, if he sat here like this, he would catch another cold.

The heat in the room had not been turned on, and it was very cold.

She contemplated whether she should turn on the heat for him.

Pulling out a remote control from somewhere on his bed, Mo Qingcheng was already turning on the heat with it. With a frown, he asked, “Why are you wearing a skirt?” A voice that was speaking muffledly, was a little sluggish, and carried a hint of reproach in it ...

T.T..... Why did she feel like she was talking to a doctor? Had she been brainwashed by what the old lady said?

“It was quite warm this morning, so I decided to wear one ...” Her cheeks

flushed slightly. Rising to her feet, she went out to pour a glass of water for him. “Cover yourself with your blanket and go to sleep... I just came to check on you. Don’t mind me.”

Behind her, it was extremely quiet.

When she walked back into the room with a glass of warm water in hand, Mo Qingcheng really had already climbed back into bed. Half lying down, half leaning against the head of his bed, he closed his eyes and continued his battle with the high fever. Seeing that his forehead was damp with sweat, Gu Sheng set the glass down on the windowsill beside the bed and walked up to the edge of the bed. She leaned over and asked softly, “Have you taken any medication yet? What does your towel look like? I’ll go wet it with some warm water so you can wipe your face?”

She was leaned over at the waist, and her hands supported her weight on the edge of the bed so she could speak to him.

She had not really thought anything about this position.

But now, as she leaned forward, she started to feel a little anxious.

Mo Qingcheng answered with an “mm.” Those eyes, which, because of his feverish state, seemed covered with a layer of mist, opened and looked at her. He continued in that indistinct voice, “I wanted to tell you last time, don’t wear dresses and skirts in the winter anymore.”

She was somewhat bewildered. How did the topic manage to come back to this again?

Reaching up, he took the thermometer out of his mouth and then explained in a quiet voice, “Girls need to be conscious about keeping themselves warm.” Because of his sore throat, he was speaking very slowly, and as a result, his tone naturally was tinged with hints of gentleness and tenderness.

.....

A “thump, thump” sound carried up from her chest to her ears. She felt slightly flustered and unconsciously pulled away to increase the distance between the two of them to a safe one. Suddenly, she felt his burning hot

finger brush her ice-cold ear. “You’ll remember to be careful about that?”

His voice was hoarse, yet his tone was gentle.

With no effort at all, he had broken down any defense she may have had and spoken straight into the very bottom of her heart...

“What color is your towel?” She abruptly leapt to her feet, whipped around, and hurried out of the room, clearly running to the pace of her own heartbeat. Her legs felt weak...

“White.”



# Chapter 36: Floured Beef Steamed in a Cup (6)

She realized she should have asked him a few more questions such as, where was it hung or about how big was it? ... But when she walked into the bathroom, she discovered those questions were completely unnecessary. On the towel rack that was outside the bathroom, there was, on the left side, a set of small, medium, and large white towels while on the right side was a set of small, medium, and large light blue towels. Hanging on the very bottom rack were two of each color.

It was very obvious how they were organized.

She thought, the top row of small towels should be for hand wiping?

The ones in the middle row should be to wipe the face?

And the last row...

The whole concept of what a bath towel was for flashed into her brain, and she immediately avoided that particular size, reaching instead for the face towel. The faucet had both cold and hot water. By the time she moistened the towel and walked back into the room, she found Mo Qingcheng had drowsily drifted off to sleep already.

He was lying there on his side, his position somewhat similar to that of a child, and his head was resting on his own left arm.

Judging from the sweat on his forehead, his fever should be starting to break?

As she thought about how miserable she was whenever she had a fever, she felt sympathy for him. She set the towel down lightly on the marble windowsill, walked over beside his bed, and slowly crouched down. Reaching over, she picked up the thermometer from beside the pillow and glanced at the reading.

Thirty-eight degrees Celsius? Ugh ... So that meant, it should have been higher than this when he took the reading a moment ago? How high? She

glanced again at the person lying on the bed, pondering a moment before using a few fingers to gently lift up his arm that was outside on top of the blanket and slip it inside the covers.

Hopefully, the fever would be completely gone by nighttime.

Then, he could eat something and be better by tomorrow.

She looked at him.

He was sleeping so deeply right here before her... Because he had sweated, his skin seemed even more pale and smooth, and there was also a faint redness to his complexion. This rather unhealthy flush actually gave the side view of his face a softer sort of beauty...

All these years, the only man's room she had ever entered was Cousin's, and this was the first time she had ever been right there before a sleeping man. In particular... this man was Toupai, that person whose casual Weibo update could cause more than a hundred thousand fans to be thrilled to death -- Qiang Qing Ci.

Three day's time ... was really not enough to eliminate the effect of the fact that he was Qiang Qing Ci ...

"Man is made neither of wood nor rock. All have feelings. It is better not to encounter one whose beauty can topple a city[1]"..... This was a line she had written in her QQ status when she had first fallen in love with his voice. The memory was still fresh in her mind, but this was her own little secret.

And now... He truly was deserving of the words, "beauty that can topple a city" [unrivalled allure]...

His eyelashes fluttered.

Her heart gave a leap.

And then... everything continued being still.

Phew. This really was too much of a challenge for her heart and its ability to handle pressure...

Gu Sheng felt that staring at him sleeping like this was too creepy, so

she walked out into the living room.

Carefully observing his home, she noticed now that it was very clean. A room with not single speck of dust in it, but there was stuff randomly tossed everywhere, from clothing to magazines to CDs and DVDs. Really, so untidy.

She put away the discs and magazines that were on the sofa and sat down to read the book that, out of habit, she always carried with her. But after reading a while, she dozed off. When she awakened again, it was because of hunger pains in her stomach, and only then did she remember that she had been so busy hurrying over here that, besides drinking some water, she had actually not eaten anything yet.

Past four o'clock already?

cold sweat She was on the way to starving herself to death.

Fortunately, the coffee table in the living room had several wooden boxes of snacks on it and they were all open. Inside them, there were all sorts of snacks.

I've been working so hard, waiting on him without complaint, and I've tolerated loneliness to stay here and keep the sick patient company. He shouldn't let me starve to death, right? ... She silently justified herself while digging through the food: "strange taste" fava beans[2], dried packaged scallops in "original flavor", spicy enoki mushrooms, melon seeds, duck gizzards...

T.T..... Two men, both ridiculous chowhounds, and they had so many snacks on hand but none of them were actually filling...

She opened up a package of scallops and in a single mouthful, had finished the bag.

Moving onto the next one...

Gu Sheng head was down as she munched away, but she was simply heading on a path where, the more she ate, the hungrier she got.

Just as she opened the seventh package, she sensed that there seemed to

be a figure standing not far away. Jumping in shock, she lifted her head. Toupai was there looking dazed and rather exhausted but watching her somewhat amusedly as she ate.

Hastily, Gu Sheng set down the snacks and stood up. "You're awake? Fever subsided yet?"

Toupai frowned. "Seems like it's gone down a bit. Fever will probably come back again tonight."

.....

"How about we go to the hospital?"

"No need. I'm used to it. Every year, there'll be several times when I get a fever. It just needs an entire night to work through and then I'll be better." He shook his head and then stepped completely out of his room.

She followed after him. "You're all sweaty. How about I turn on the heat in the living room for you? Otherwise, you're going to catch another cold right away."

Toupai shook his head. "No, it'll be fine."

She noticed that he was heading toward the kitchen. "Are you hungry? Or do you want a drink?"

Halting his steps, Toupai lowered his head to look down at Gu Sheng beside him. From the look in his eyes, it seemed his mind had finally cleared slightly from its groggy state.

Am I nagging him too much? Why doesn't he keep walking? ...

He smiled a little helplessly and amusedly. "I just want to go to the bathroom."

.....

.....

"Go ahead..."

She watched as he walked into the washroom and pulled the sliding door shut, feeling suddenly that she really was not much use here. Toupai

seemed like someone who especially knew how to take care of himself... Really, she came here because she was afraid his fever would suddenly spike and she could go with him to the hospital, or if he was hungry, she could help make sure he was fed..... The former situation did not seem very likely to occur? As for the latter... it seemed she had fed herself full first.

sigh

Gu Sheng analyzed her situation. After Toupai had washed his face and walked back out, she asked him, "What are you going to do about dinner tonight? What would you like to eat? I'll make it for you?" Even though I can't compare to your skills as a chef, I can still manage rice porridge or something like that...

He did not answer her and instead asked her, "Were they good, those snacks?"

"Mm-hmm..." So awkward. Gu Sheng nodded. "Pretty good."

He smiled and, in a sick and feeble voice, asked again, "Which one do you like? I'll buy more next time."

"The scallop is pretty good... The enoki mushrooms weren't bad either..." Gu Sheng thought a bit and decided to be honest. "Forget it. Let me buy it for you in the future. At least, get something that makes you feel full after you've eaten it."

He gave an "mm" in response.

And then... he went back onto his own bed...

Without prompting, she again poured him a glass of warm water, walked into his room, and handed it to him. "You sweated a lot. Have some water." After she finished saying this, she felt a little bit self-conscious. It seemed as if, to her, having a fever = drink warm water + sleep.

Mo Qingcheng took the glass of water from her.

He took a drink.

..... And then another drink.

There was only the faint sound of water being swallowed.

She leaned forward, took the glass from him, and placed it on the bookshelf beside the bed. Turning her head back, she was about to stand up when she felt a slight pain in her scalp. Her hair had gotten tangled in his watch...

Oh crud...

She was about to pull the strands out.

With a low voice, Toupai stopped her. "Don't pull. I'll help you untangle them."

His voice brushed the side of her ear. After she heard him say this, she stopped the manhandling of her own hair and simply sat down like this, close beside him.

Toupai brushed away her hair that was blocking his view and used his hand to follow the snarled strands until he touched his watch. It seemed as if he was unable to unravel them, so he took off his watch and, with lowered head, carefully scrutinized where the hairs were caught.

He patiently worked on untangling them and wrapped those strands lightly around his finger.

She dared not move, accommodating him as much as possible as she sat there next to him. Her one hand was on the bed on the other side of him, propping up her body weight in an almost bizarre position where she was half hanging over him. The slightest loss of focus and she would be leaning on top of his leg...

Hurry up and get untangled, oh please, hurry up and untangle...

The room was very dim...

She shifted slightly but ended up bumping against his leg. As if scalded, she recoiled away.

Ouch... She had jerked her hair again...

“That hurt?” He lifted his head.

“Mm.”

He sighed, “Don’t move if it hurts.”

“Okay.”

He lowered his head.

“Um...”

Mo Qingcheng raised his head again.

“How about we turn on some lights first?”

Since there was no power outage, there honestly should not be any reason for doing the job in the dark, ah...

Or alternatively, just break those strands T.T.

When Mo Qingcheng heard her suggestion, his expression was one of confusion for half a second and then, sudden comprehension... Just as he was about to say something, there was a sound at the doorway of someone clearing his throat. “Pardon me, you two... Want me to close the door for you?”

\*

[1] 人非木石皆有情，不如不遇倾城色 Taken from the poem, 《李夫人》 Lady Li, written by Tang dynasty poet, Bai Juyi. Recall that the “unrivalled allure” part of Toupai’s nickname is actually taken from the saying that he has “beauty that can bring the downfall of a city.”

[2] 怪味蚕豆 A snack originating from Chongqing. Fava beans are flavoured with several dry, powder-form seasonings that range from sweet to spicy to salty so that when eaten, there are multiple layers of flavor; hence it’s name, “strange taste.”

# Chapter 37: Floured Beef Steamed in a Cup (7)

Oh gawd!.....

Gu Sheng abruptly leapt up from the bed onto her feet, nearly bursting into tears. Why was Jue Mei here, ah?!!!!

More than a dozen strands of hair all snapped. All that hard work just now was basically... wasted. Mo Qingcheng wanted to laugh but coughed several times instead. In a weary and somewhat resigned voice, he answered, "If you want to help us close the door, go ahead, but first turn on the lights for us."

A hand reached into the room, felt along the wall, and found the light switch.

With a click, the entire room was illuminated.

Jue Mei finally stuck his head into the room and nosily gave a couple of glances around. The male and female stars of the show, one was still coughing lightly and the other was standing there with her head down looking like she had stolen a hundred chickens, but there otherwise didn't seem to be anything... unusual going on with them? He grinned apologetically, "Please forgive the imagination of someone who does voice acting... For example, 'That hurt? Mm... Don't move if it hurts...' and other dialogue like that." He cleared his throat. "You get what I mean, Toupai DaRen."

"You're done playing your video games?"

"Almost. Hungry... Wanted to come out and dig up something to eat. Otherwise, I wouldn't dare disturb you guys."

He had been here the whole time?

Jue Mei had been home the whole time?!

Gu Sheng stared incredulously at Toupai. Toupai seemed to know what she wanted to ask, and in a hoarse voice, he explained, "When you first



got here, I sent him a message telling him to hang out in his own room and not come out to wander around so you wouldn't feel awkward or uncomfortable."

.....

.....

Now I feel even more awkward, you know? ...

Gu Sheng felt she could not stand like this beside him any longer, letting that tall, strapping man at the doorway watch them like a spectator. Rolling up her sleeves, she started heading towards the kitchen, murmuring as if to herself, "We'll have rice porridge tonight, okay? You should have uncooked rice in your home, right? And I'll make some lighter dishes..."

She did not get to finish what she was saying.

The person leaning back in bed gently spoke up his objection. "I want to eat floured beef steamed in a cup tonight."

Gu Sheng turned back to look blankly at him. Weren't sick people supposed to eat lighter?

"Okay?" He... he intentionally changed his voice again. He used one that was instantly able to completely do her in to softly ask her if it was okay... Gu Sheng took a quick breather to overcome the side of her that had completely surrendered to him. Hardening her heart, she refused him. "Another day, okay? You have a fever today..."

"The ingredients are all ready and in the fridge," he said, already lifting off the covers and getting off the bed. He slipped his bare feet into a pair of slippers. "The fever seems to have gone down a bit right now. I'll go make it for you guys."

.....

.....

Staring at him there in his short-sleeve shirt, she had an urge to bury him inside his blankets. How could she bear to let him go to the kitchen

to cook?

Gu Sheng's gaze flitted all around. Feeling especially helpless, she tried one more time to convince this man who, when he stood up, was a full head taller than her. "You need to eat lighter foods when you have a fever... You're a doctor yourself..."

Hey, the tall, strapping guy off to the side there, can you not say something to persuade him?!

With an innocent expression that seemed to say, "I honestly don't know how to cook," Jue Mei Sha Yi returned the look Gu Sheng gave him.

So, in this way, she watched as Mo Qingcheng slipped on his watch again. With an unperturbed expression on his face, he walked over to the wardrobe to grab a sweatshirt to wear. He truly intended on going like that to make dinner for them while still fevering...

He was completely taking up this task wholeheartedly and without any complaint. Completely ... being wholeheartedly willing and uncomplaining, so much so that it caused your heart to ache ...

"I'll make it... But, you can only eat a little bit."

She surrendered, utterly and completely.

Since she agreed to make the steamed beef for him, she had no choice but to follow his instructions, finding all the ingredients in the refrigerator. Even the individual tart moulds could be found. Oh my gosh, if Toupai was not a doctor, he would unquestionably be an internationally recognized chef...

She started to recall...

In those previous five minutes, how had Toupai sat face-to-face with her and explained the recipe for making this dish? He had only managed to say a couple of sentences before his body was racked with a low cough, and he had had to pick up a glass and take several drinks of water. In the end, she could not bear to see him like that and had told him that she would look up the recipe on Baidu herself and figure out how to make it.

Hopefully... what she cooked would not be too disappointing.

Toupai had already pre-sliced the beef.

The white porcelain bowl next to her hand had already been filled with a rice-millet flour mixture consisting of ground uncooked long grain rice, glutinous rice, and foxtail millet...

These had been prepared when he came home today at noon... At the time, he should have had a fever already. Sure enough, nothing could stop him from advancing his desire to have steamed floured beef...

She poured the beef into the porcelain bowl, added baking soda and some cooking wine, and then stirred hard ... The recipe did not say how long to mix it, so she decided to simply put in a good effort and stir for a while before then adding scallions, ginger, water, soy sauce, and olive oil.

It needed to be marinated for ten minutes?

She looked down at the bowl, then glanced at her watch.

“It’s a good thing you came.” Jue Mei stood at the door of the kitchen, watching her and also sighing. “The more I think about it, the more I feel that the person who benefits most from him having a girlfriend is definitely me. You know, if you hadn’t come, I’m sure I would have had to make this meal...”

Jue Mei did not know how to cook at all and was accustomed normally to getting served by Toupai, so even more so, he felt that cooking was the topmost scariest task.

Gu Sheng laughed, “I’m not that good at cooking either... But I can learn relatively quickly, I’m guessing, probably because I’m a girl. I just need to look at the recipe once and I can basically make something pretty close to what it should be.”

“Him too.” Jue Mei held this in deep admiration. “Most of his time is spent shopping in the grocery store. He’ll buy whatever veggie or meat he wants to eat, then he’ll go research recipes and think about how to use the ingredients...”

Buy the ingredients first before deciding how to use them?

A very... advanced foodie.

The online identity, Qiang Qing Ci, who did not seem like he partook of things of this world, in reality, was more the Mo Qingcheng who loved good food.

An angel who had fallen into a kitchen. He was becoming more and more real.

Gu Sheng and Jue Mei casually chatted while she made rice porridge and washed and cut the vegetables she had pulled out from the refrigerator. She did not really cook at home either T.T... Hopefully she did not embarrass herself too much in front of these two men.

“He’s faded out of the online entertainment circle for two or three years now.” Jue Mei unexpectedly changed the topic. “He doesn’t have too much spare time, so he doesn’t really pay attention to any of the gossip going on in the circle.” Gu Sheng switched on the rice cooker and then, not really understanding what Jue Mei was trying to say, looked over at him with a puzzled expression.

“You know about that message forwarding incident he once had?”

“Yes.”

That could be considered the only black mark in Qiang Qing Ci’s history? In fact, he had only been trying to be kind. He had been @ by someone in a post that was looking for a lost pet, and he merely had tried to help by retweeting the post. In the end, though, it was found out that the post was just a scam to try to gain retweets, and the supposed phone number of the pet owner was actually a pay-per-call number.

When the scam was confirmed, he immediately deleted the Weibo post and posted an apology.

However, that was unable to prevent the large number of badmouthing posts that had condemned him from top to bottom, to the point that finally, they had speculated with certainty that he was the mastermind behind the whole scheme and was even splitting the profits of the pay-

per-call number...

For three whole months, his fans and the people badmouthing him were in vicious quarreling, and there were also malicious spectators who would throw in little untruths and details to play up the situation. Even to this day, threads on various forums discussing the gossip of the 2-D world would always have someone mentioning this incident and claiming in definite words that it was true...

Where there were people, there would be conflict and grudges.

The more famous one became, the more jealous people became...

She fell for his voice relatively late in his career, and it was only last year when she had heard about this incident.

However, she still felt he had been unfairly wronged.

Pouring some oil into the wok, she began to stir-fry some shiitake mushrooms and choy sum.

“That’s why, eh, there’s a type of hate that we call ‘jealousy-envy-hate.’” Jue Mei grinned and looked at her. “With this sort of hate, you can’t debate with them and agree on right or wrong. You can only let time tell everything.”

And with that, Jue Mei sauntered away...

Gu Sheng stared uncomprehendingly for a moment before suddenly realizing what he wanted to say.

All those negative criticisms of her works floating out on the web ... Her lips turned up in a smile. Even just at noon today, she had been upset about this, but after Mo Qingcheng’s fever disrupted everything, she seemed to feel that none of this really mattered anymore ...

People can hide behind their computer screen, and they do not need to take responsibility for what they say.

So, when you shut off your computer, everything will go away.

She finished stir-frying the shiitake and choy sum, served it onto a plate, and took it out to the dining room table.

It should be about ten minutes now...

What needed to be done next?...

Oh, darn. She needed to look it up online again. Dejectedly, she headed back into Toupai's bedroom, picked up his laptop, and looked through that webpage that was still open. As she sat on the couch, she saw Toupai getting off his bed again. Oh my, what was she going to do with him? "Don't keep getting out of bed... It'll make your cold worse." Though, he had already been forced by her to put on a long-sleeved shirt a little while ago.

But it really was not good for someone with a fever to walk around like this, ah.

T.T.....

How come when she was around him, she became so nagging?...

He pulled out a throat lozenge and sucked on it as he sat down next to her. Pointing at his throat, he said, "No more fever, just a sore throat, so it's no big deal."

"When I had fevers in the past, I wouldn't be able to get out of bed for the whole day."

Mo Qingcheng smiled unconcernedly. "One time, I had a fever in the morning but was called into work for the afternoon, and I worked all the way until the following morning."

..... That was what you called, working yourself to death?

Gu Sheng's brow furrowed. "Don't your mom and dad worry? ... To let you work like that..."

"They're okay. One of them works in the liver transplant center and the other is a cardiac surgeon. It's already pretty good if the two of them can sit down to have a couple dinners together during the week. That's why they encouraged me to choose the relatively lighter and more relaxed workload of cardiology. They probably... don't think my work is too exhausting."

He wasn't a pediatrician?

The information of the old lady across the hall was really not reliable, ah...

But could stuff involving the heart really be "lighter and more relaxed"? ... Her understanding of the hospital was no different from any other ordinary person. Occasionally, she would complain about it being too busy or how a doctor was bad or something. Even though, since she learned that he was a doctor, these angels in white coats had suddenly become a lot more loveable to her... But, she still did not understand their work.

She could only give a vague "mm" in reply and continue to bury her head down to look over the recipe.

The next steps were easy. Take the rice-millet flour and beef he had prepared and mix them together. Spoon the mixture into the tart moulds and steam them for twelve minutes. Pour hot sesame oil over each one, and then they were ready. A very easy dish to make. Of course, he had actually done all the prep work already.

Mo Qingcheng was sucking on his throat lozenge, and occasionally, there would be the sound of the lozenge bumping against teeth.

She committed the steps to memory and was about to set down the laptop off to the side when she felt a weight on her shoulder. Just like that, his chin was resting on her shoulder... His voice was right by her ear as it said softly, "Thank you my girlfriend DaRen for all your trouble, making dinner for me."

The warmth of his breath plus his voice...

The voice she had the most difficulty resisting...

His voice was somewhat muffled and unclear but was very warm and gentle as it continued, "Thank you for coming to keep me company."

.....

She answered very quietly, "I was worried you were home alone... In case

there was no one to take care of you...”

Then, there were a few seconds of silence.

She seemed to sense that he wanted to.....

All the blood in her body once again rushed upwards, and even her neck turned red. Immediately, she put down the computer and dashed out. “I’m going to cook dinner now.”

She slipped into the kitchen and did not come out again until dinner was complete. She glanced at the two men, who had sat down already and were eating tofu with scallions and rice porridge, and wordlessly seated herself next to Mo Qingcheng. The two of them were in the middle of a casual conversation, and as Jue Mei chatted away, he ended up bringing up the topic of Wanmei’s upcoming anniversary celebration. Jue Mei said with a show of seriousness, “You have to make sure your throat and voice are better by that day.”

Mo Qingcheng used his chopsticks to pick up bite after bite of tofu. “Don’t talk about work when eating.”

Jue Mei gave an “oh” in reply. Beaming, he looked at Gu Sheng for three full seconds, until Gu Sheng felt her hairs rise, before continuing to ask Mo Qingcheng, “Did I interrupt something good a while ago?”

Gu Sheng had been sipping rice porridge right then and nearly choked...

“Don’t cross the line.” Toupai’s eyes squinted as he carried on with munching on the tofu in a manner that could be called “returning gratitude and vengeance accordingly” ...

Jue Mei guffawed at this. The topic quickly changed over to his annual physical check-up, and as he talked about it, he went off to grab the medical report to hand over to Mo Qingcheng. Mo Qingcheng flipped through it. “No real big problems. Just that you’ve been eating too well normally, and if you don’t pay more attention, you’re going to get fatty liver.”

Sighing, Jue Mei looked over at Gu Sheng. “You say, anyone who sticks with him will eventually eat so well they get sick.”



Gu Sheng felt his words did make sense. She nodded. "You need to eat both meat and vegetables. Occasionally adding some sort of whole grain or something would be best."

Jue Mei answered, "I'll try. When he's not home, I just eat cornmeal porridge."

With a light laugh, Gu Sheng lowered her head to continue eating her rice porridge.

However, she had just taken a swallow when Jue Mei added in a heartfelt tone, "So when you marry him, you have to be cautious about this, too."

Her mouthful of rice porridge got stuck in her throat.

It scalded her so badly that tears sprung out from her eyes...

# Chapter 38: Salt and Pepper Mushrooms

## (1)

Jue Mei lived up to being the leader of Wanmei. His ability to tease people was at a level equivalent to that of an old demon lord.

Her meal was eaten in a state of confusion and turmoil.

The steamed floured beef Mo Qingcheng had been longing for had only had half a bite taken out of it before a phone call came from the hospital saying there was a patient with myocardial infarction who needed surgery. She had to say, he was truly a work machine. He put his chopsticks down and immediately left.

She did not want to finish dinner sitting one-on-one with Jue Mei Sha, so she, too, put down her chopsticks and walked with him out of his community compound. Only later, when she got back to her school, did she realize that she had not had lunch and had only eaten a few bites at dinner before she had left. She was so hungry her stomach felt as if it was empty to the point that her chest was touching her back. At the main gates of her university, she bought a Shandong jian bing[1], and nibbling away at it, she headed back to her dormitory.

All of a sudden, someone from behind slapped her on the shoulder.

"I heard Jue Mei interrupted your bed scene today." Holding a jian bing as well, Geng Xiaoxing took a bite.

Gu Sheng nearly sprayed a mouthful of blood on her face...

"How about this? I'll give it a try, and if we think our ideas don't work with each other, we can terminate the contract at any time."

This was the reply she had mulled over for two weeks and had finally, in between the times she was organizing the library, given to Ling Long Ti Tou.

In this period when she was being fiercely criticized and denounced, the sudden news of her collaboration with Ling Long Ti Tou was certainly

another huge piece of gossip. She surmised that... someone might say that Toupai had used his connections to create this opportunity and that was the reason why she had this chance.

As a result, she did not even accept the deposit, which was a standard practice, and said she would write the song first.

She stood on a small stepladder in the library, her hand tapping the books lightly, one after another as she worked her way along the row. Her mind was feeling restless as she pulled a book out and browsed through it, and her brain had already switched into a music-composing mode.

A melody was floating around in her head when a phone call from Toupai started ringing.

He was going to meet her for lunch today at her school, but it was still an hour before their arranged time? Gu Sheng picked up her mobile phone, glanced at her classmates who were working away nearby, and asked quietly, "I'm still at the library. You've arrived already?"

"Pretty lady." Inside her phone receiver, it turned out to be... Mo Bai's voice. "I begged Toupai for half an hour before he finally let me talk to you. Let me take a moment and cry first..."

.....

Gu Sheng was somewhat embarrassed as well as a little confused.

He was bringing a troop of friends and relatives to have a date with her? ... Why was Mo Bai here?

"I'm here for a photo session at your school. You've heard of Hatsune Miku?"

"Uh-huh..." She remembered she had recorded covers of a few of Miku's songs.

"We need to take some group photos with fourteen Mikus, but one of the girls stood us up and hasn't arrived yet. There's also another girl who got sick. But I'm in a rush and need to get this out," Mo Bai explained as concisely as possible, worried that Toupai would not give him a chance to

talk anymore. “Could you... do me a favour and sub in for one of them?”

.....

“You want me to cosplay Hatsune Miku?” She was not quite sure that was what he was saying.

Mo Bai very happily confirmed this.

This was not a difficult favour, just that it was rather sudden. Gu Sheng had no real excuse to get out of it, so after asking for their whereabouts in the university, she soon went off to find them.

The architecture of her university was very beautiful.

It was still early in spring, shortly after the flowers had started blooming, but there were already many different sorts of associations and photography hobbyists in various corners taking pictures. Particularly on the weekends, when there were not many students in the teaching buildings, they were very suitable for using as a set or background.

Sure enough, when she followed Mo Bai’s instructions and arrived on the top floor of the teaching building on the east side of campus, she found Mo Bai and the others. There was also another group at the site, holding large flash reflectors and shooting photographs.

Mo Qingcheng and Mo Bai were standing off to the side of the top floor terrace, chatting and admiring the view.

As she followed the staircase up, she discovered that these two men had clearly become the “view” to look at in the eyes of all the girls there. The two were approximately the same height. Because Mo Bai was in his cosplay costume, he was only leaning against the railing, whereas Mo Qingcheng was sitting on top of it... From her angle, behind him, all that could be seen were blue sky and white clouds. If someone pressed the shutter right at that moment, it would be a perfectly composed masterpiece.

Of course, besides the fact that his hand was holding a bubble milk tea that was still sealed.

At the same time she was looking at him, he happened to see her and waved in her direction.

Immediately, all eyes turned toward her.

Such was the magnetism of Toupai... even though she believed that ninety-nine percent of the people here did not even know he was Qiang Qing Ci. Gu Sheng walked over to them and was just about to speak when she saw Mo Bai's eyes widen. And then, in an instant, he had broken out into loud guffaws... His laughter was very dramatic, and even Mo Qingcheng could not hold back the smile on the corner of his lips.

She instinctively turned around to look.

And at once, she understood what was so funny.

A beautiful maiden had just come up the stairway. She wore a wig of Hatsune Miku's signature long, blue hair, and her pretty oval face was covered with heavy cosplay make-up. Underneath the jacket draped over her shoulders was a midriff-baring girl's outfit that very much showed off the figure. Standing all around the terrace were a dozen or so Mikus, all dressed in various outfits, but this one was absolutely the finest... The problem was... "she" was actually Mu Mu...

She could not help wanting to laugh. This Mu Mu DaRen had only done some male-to-female crossplay when he had first started cosplaying. Who would have thought that this time around, not only was he willing to set aside his pride but... he even wore an outfit that was "suitable for mature audiences only"? ...

With his jacket draped on him, he came over to them. He could not help rubbing his eyes and muttering, "These circle lenses are uncomfortable to wear..." When he finished saying this, his large eyes with blue irises swept silently over to Gu Sheng. "Your man said you can't wear such revealing clothes." Mu Mu felt his midriff-baring outfit was a little uncomfortable and very miserably wrapped his arms around his own bare waist. "So, I had no choice and had to wear it instead."

With a "pfft," Gu Sheng burst out in laughter.

Mo Qingcheng put his arm around her shoulders and gently pulled her close in front of himself while placing the nice, warm milk tea he was holding into her hand. "It's too cold out for girls to wear clothes that don't cover their abdomen."

Mo Bai only gazed at him with a look of despise where it seemed, on his left eye was clearly etched the word "old" while on the right eye, "fashioned."

Mu Mu had a bitter look on his face, and he, too, was looking at Toupai. Written plainly on those blue eyes were the words, "I don't believe you."

In the washroom of the top floor, Gu Sheng changed into the one and only costume that was a full-length pair of pants. The make-up artist smilingly complimented her on how her skin was just as nice as Mu Mu's while at the same time carefully applying make-up onto her face. The two of them had not managed to exchange many sentences of casual conversation when, from outside, someone could be heard saying something in a taunting and derisive tone. From the sound of the voice, it was a man.

"Whoa, you've followed me all the way here?"

"I couldn't find you, I couldn't find you anywhere." It was a girl.

"Haven't you found me now? I seldom get a chance to go out with friends, but when I do, your source of information is pretty good."

"Didn't you say you weren't going to fool around anymore?..." The girl had started to cry. "Didn't you say you weren't going to hang around with A'Yu and them anymore?..."

"Do we know each other that well?" The man sniggered a couple of times.

.....

She was separated from this scene by only a single wall, and even if she did not want to, it was impossible not to clearly hear every word.

What followed was somewhat unclear.

She blinked, feeling for the girl. This guy was not worth it.

Next time, be more cautious. sigh...

“Stop blinking. Your mascara isn’t dry yet. I’ll put another layer on for you.” The make-up artist continued working on her. “That guy is a scumbag. When I first heard of him, he was still relatively unknown. Now that he’s got a little bit of fame, he’s starting to fool around with all sorts of young girls. Sheesh...”

“You b\*stard!”

A sudden curse carrying a sob in it rang out.

Gu Sheng gave a start. The make-up artist was startled as well, and the mascara was brushed onto Gu Sheng’s eyelid instead.

“I’ve always been a b\*stard. Aren’t you the one who likes good-for-nothing b\*stards?” the man sneered. “You’ve found me, but it’s pointless. I have no education. I’m not working. I don’t have money. You figure out for yourself what to do... You’re past the age of fourteen now. Even if your mom and dad sue me, it’ll be no use, get it? Eh?”

Scumbag...

Gu Sheng fumed with rage as she listened with gritted teeth.

Slap! A very clear, crisp sound.

Her and the make-up artist’s eyes widened simultaneously. They’re fighting?

And then, there was the sound of someone slamming into the wall.

Oh no...

The young girl would be the one who suffered if she fought the man!

She did not care about make-up or anything now, and immediately, she rushed out.

But to her surprise, it was not just two people out in the hallway. There were actually four people?!

The girl who had just gotten hit was now being shielded behind one of

Mu Mu's arms.

But Gu Sheng's eyes were focused on the one who was supposed to still be out on the terrace right now – Mo Qingcheng. In that instant when she had dashed out, he had already thrown out a punch. Bam! His fist slammed into bone and flesh, not holding back in the least.

The girl being protected was stupefied.

The make-up artist was stupefied.

The man who had fallen forcefully to the floor was completely stupefied.

Mo Qingcheng half-crouched down and looked down at the stunned scumbag of a person. “You would go so far as to hit a girl. You can't really be considered a man.”

Wide-eyed, Gu Sheng stared in disbelief at this Mo Qingcheng who was in front of her.

So unexpected.

So shocking.

So violent.

So satisfying...

When the warm, gentle doctor rips off his necktie and instantly becomes a hoodlum.....

That's just T.T ... So attractive!

\*

[1] 山东煎饼 “Shandong jian bing.” A popular street food. Traditionally, a whole grain, thin, crepe-like outer layer is used to wrap inside of it leek, various vegetables, meats and sometimes, even various other delicacies. There are many spins and variations on this street food nowadays.



# Chapter 39: Salt and Pepper Mushrooms

## (2)

“F\*\*\*! F\*\*\* you...” After two seconds, the man finally recovered and scrambled back to his feet like a madman. Retreating back four or five steps, he finally took a good look at the people before him.

God Mu? How did he manage to incur the attention of this god? ...

He spat. Tasting blood in his mouth, he immediately became scared.

That man that he did not even know had been so fierce when he struck...

Mo Qingcheng straightened up, not intending to fight anymore.

He had just finished up a seminar today and had come right over specifically to have lunch with Sheng Sheng. As a result, his attire, of course, was much more gentlemanly and dignified. When he threw the punch, he had actually been hampered by his dress shirt and dress pants. Very awkward.

He opened and closed his fingers lightly and straightened his tie. The scumbag was so frightened by this he backed up another two steps.

Seeing the terrified look on the scumbag's face, Mo Qingcheng's brows furrowed slightly, and the outer corners of his eyes seemed to curve upward a touch.

The man did not dare get anywhere close to Mo Qingcheng, so he turned his attention to Mu Mu and started yelling, “God Mu, oh you're just so d\*mn good! Don't think that just because you started in the entertainment circle early, you're some great god and can beat people up whenever you feel like it...”

Mu Mu's large blue eyes took a glance at Mo Qingcheng, then flicked over to look wordlessly at the scumbag. His face clearly read, “Are you blind? I'm not the one who punched you... If you're so good, go curse Toupai, eh ...”

Of course, he did not dare say that this person was Qiang Qing Ci.

More than half of the cosplayers behind them were fans of Toupai... He did not want the situation to get too chaotic and to have all of the work from today be wasted...

The scumbag's loud yelling had drawn the attention of the people who had been on the top floor terrace.

Mo Bai had always been someone who would defend his own people first before even figuring out who was at fault, and when he heard someone shouting God Mu, he had immediately pulled up the hem of his clothes and rushed over. After seeing that the one who had gotten beat up was this scumbag, he delightedly moved in closer to them and draped an arm on Mu Mu's shoulder. "What's up? Got in a fight? You actually dared to do it and weren't worried that your ability – you know, the one where you can chop a brick with your hand – would beat him so bad he'd become crippled? Leave this type of scum to me. I'm more than adequate enough to deal with it..."

Mu Mu looked at Mo Bai in silence and was very truthful as he pointed at Mo Qingcheng.

He had only been keeping Toupai company and had strolled over here with him to see if Gu Sheng was ready when they happened upon the girl getting hit by this scumbag ... The kind person standing up for righteousness was Toupai Daren. He was just a backdrop. A backdrop!

When this scumbag comrade saw that there were so many people watching, he was emboldened. After all, Mo Bai and Mu Mu were well-known personages, and they could not really do anything to him out in public. "Don't think that just because you guys are part of a big association you can bully other people. Let me tell you..."

Mo Bai's response, however, was not what was expected. With an "oh," he stated, "We are bullying you. So what?"

.....

The rest of the man's words ended up being caught in his throat.

Mo Bai rolled up his sleeves and walked toward him.

The man put on a bold front and forced himself to hold his ground. “What? ... You want to fight three against one? Let me tell you, Mo Bai, assaulting someone is... is against the law...”

With so many people watching, he did not believe these two would really dare raise a hand against him. And if worse came to worse, he would call the police...

Mo Bai smirked. Moving in closer to him, he reached out and casually patted the man’s chest, saying in a low tone, “Against the law? What we’re doing is called ‘bravely standing up for righteousness’, you get it? I’m really not trying to scare you. My God Mu is a cop himself. When he has nothing to do and is bored, he beats up someone; so what? Check out the sky. Not a cloud in sight. It’d be a waste of such great weather if we didn’t give a scum a thrashing-- ”

Mo Bai was still grinning at him. On his left, standing not far behind him, was Mu Mu; on his right was Mo Qingcheng.

All the cosplayers were shocked by Mo Bai’s words, not willing to believe that the normally deadpan face Mu Mu – usually three beats behind in everything and, right at this moment, was like a goddess standing there, waist so small and legs so long he evoked jealousy, envy, and hate – was actually a police officer.

A handsome, just, and righteous big brother police officer!

That so made people want to squeal!

And then there was Mo Bai and the other guy... Wonder who the other guy was... Such eye candy. That so made people’s blood boil with exhilaration!

Mu Mu did not utter a word, and his silence could be taken as unspoken admission to what Mo Bai had said, even though... he still had not graduated yet ...

The scumbag had a feeling that if he fought them one against three, he would definitely end up crippled. With one hand covering his cheek, he

spat, “Mo Bai, there are so many people watching. If you have the gall to hit me, then I’m not scared to expose to everyone the fact that you beat up a person today...” He did not believe that these people, who had long since been raised onto the god pedestal, did not care about their own reputations ...

“We like taking advantage of our numbers to bully people.” Mo Bai grinned.

“If worse comes to worse, I’ll throw in everything I have, and if I have to leave the entertainment circle, I’ll still go smear all your names...”

The latter half of his sentence obviously lacked conviction, and his voice was noticeably weaker when he said it.

Mo Bai let out a “pfft” as he snickered and took another two steps forward.

He lowered his voice, and using a volume that only someone who was right by them could hear, he said, “Let me tell you. You know that guy who just smacked you? If you dare try to smear his name, even if his fans are each only allowed to spit once on you, you’d still drown to death. If you don’t believe me.... you can give it a try. See if you can still carry on in the entertainment circle.”

His voice was very quiet. Those girls standing and watching from far away on the stairs could not hear at all what was being said. Seeing only the side profile of Mo Bai’s beaming face, they could not guess what he had suddenly said.

The man, his hand still covering one side of his face, stared blankly at him for a few seconds.

“Alright. Hurry up and get lost now.” Mo Bai patted him on the shoulder.

Useless to call the cops. Useless to escalate this into a big ordeal. Just as Mo Bai had said: When someone like him, who did not have any sort of real job and had a bad reputation, offended the “gods” of various places, he really had no hope of surviving...

Very quickly, he spat on the ground and then, with tail between his legs, he left.

The girl that had been shielded was silent for quite some time. Afraid to approach Mo Qingcheng and Mu Mu, who were emitting an aura that said, “Strangers, keep away from me”, she instead very quietly said thank you to Mo Bai.

“No problem, no problem.” Mo Bai did not really take the situation to heart and, clapping his hands, he called to everyone, “Break it up, all of you, break it up now. My fourteen beautiful Miku-s, let’s hurry up and finish the shoot, and then I’ll treat you all to coffee at McDonald’s... I’m freezing to death here. Who chose to do the shoot on the terrace, huh? Seriously...”

“I’m wearing an outfit that shows my navel and I haven’t complained that it’s cold yet...” Mu Mu stated the facts, then smugly strolled away.

Afterwards, the entire photo shoot took two and a half hours until finally, when Mo Qingcheng was nearly at a point where his entire face was scowling, they wrapped up. Even Gu Sheng, the only one wearing full length pants, was feeling a little cold. After all, besides having a pair of gloves, the top half of her arms were completely exposed. All the cosplayers had squeezed themselves into the ladies’ restroom that was one floor down from the top level to remove their make-up.

Gu Sheng was very familiar with this teaching building, and seeing that everyone was already crammed inside, she pulled Mo Qingcheng away with her to use the restroom on the teacher’s floor.

She had done some labour work for the teachers here, so she was especially familiar with this section. However, she did not expect that, when she stood at the stairs and looked around, she would actually see some teachers walking by... She absolutely could not let any teachers see her like this, a face covered in heavy make-up, a wig of blue, waist-length hair still on her head.

If she went to any other floors, she would definitely be stared at like she was some weird sight...

Forget it. Better to just go back to the top floor.

She turned around and whispered a “shh” to Mo Qingcheng before explaining, “Oh no, my teachers are here. Let’s go back up to the top floor.”

After saying this, she darted up more than a dozen steps to the corner of a landing between two floors.

“The other floors don’t have a women’s restroom where you can change and remove your make-up?” He followed behind her. Since his legs were long, he very naturally climbed two stairs at a time and after three to five strides, had caught up to her.

“They do,” she answered him honestly, “but I feel uncomfortable going to other floors dressed... like this. The top floor has a whole bunch of people who are just like me so I won’t stand out.”

She was not, after all, a professional cosplayer and could not make herself feel at ease doing this sort of work.

Mo Qingcheng chuckled, “It actually looks quite nice.”

“Huh?”

“I meant, your Miku look actually is really nice.”

He’s doing it again...

He’s doing it again...

The more she was unable to resist the lure of his voice, the more he liked to use her favourite voice style to talk softly to her.

This particularly staircase was not frequently used. It was off to the side rather than in the middle of the building where it would be cut off from the outside. Here, the light was very natural, and there was even a light draft that gently blew by her cheek, stirring up feelings inside of her.

She gazed at his face and eyes, bathed in the light of the sun, and suddenly said softly, “You were especially handsome just a moment ago... My heart nearly leapt out of my chest...”

“Really?”

“That type of person deserves to get a beating. You know, he didn’t do anything illegal, but it’s something that everyone, gods and people, despise with a passion.” Gu Sheng admitted, “I thought you would be really... you know, that type of person. I never would have thought you would hit anyone.”

She recalled the time, outside the hospital, he had also shielded a girl behind himself, but that time, he had not hit anyone and rather, had taken the hit for someone else ...

Mo Qingcheng looked at the expression of righteous indignation on her face and could not help laughing out loud. In a joking tone, he told her, “The doctor-patient relationship is so strained nowadays that I have to have some self-defense skills before I’d dare pick up a surgical knife to save people.”

When he said this, it reminded her of all sorts of news stories she had heard. “..... I saw you take a punch for someone.”

“In front of the main hospital entrance?” he recalled.

“Mm-hmm. Does that happen a lot?”

“Very rare. That time was just a coincidence.”

She leaned against the wall and blew out a breath in relief. “That’s good.”

“Are you worried about me?” His voice had lowered again.

So devious. He was doing it again...

She finally could not help complaining, “You know I’m a voice lover... and you’re still speaking like that on purpose.”

“Am I?” His voice grew even softer, slower, and gentler, speaking straight into the depths of her heart.

She exhaled lightly. “Aren’t you worried that... I like your voice more than I like you as a person?”

“Whichever part of me you choose to like is still liking me, isn’t it?” he smiled as he quietly pointed out the logic of the situation. “There is nothing wrong with liking my voice. It’s better than having nothing that attracts you.”

.....

.....

She could not tell whether she was being bewitched by his words or enticed by the sound of his voice.

But... she was starting again to lose her ability to think.

A breeze lifted up the stray blue hairs that were beside her cheek and blew them up in front of her eyes. In her vision, he distinctly seemed to be leaning closer. Closer and closer. He did not say anything, only smiled.

Now...

He really wanted to...

Each second was stretched out by an infinite amount. She did not dare move. Just before he made contact, she completely closed her eyes.

A warm, soft kiss.

Their lips only touched for a few, brief seconds, though, and then he moved away.

That... was it?

She was so nervous her heart was about to leap out, and her eyes immediately flew open and looked up at him.

Mo Qingcheng wiped the corner of his lip with his thumb. Sure enough, he saw a streak of bright red on its tip. “Too much lipstick. If you were to swallow it, it would not be good for your body. I, on the other hand, don’t really mind for myself...”

Swallow it...

Not good for the body...

T.T.....



Could you get any more specific... and any more serious?.....

# Chapter 40: Salt and Pepper Mushrooms

## (3)

After Mo Qingcheng finished saying this, he straightened and gestured to Gu Sheng to hurry to the restroom to remove her make-up and change. After all, it was still very cool in early spring. That remarkable feeling from just a moment ago was still lingering around the two of them, so much so that Gu Sheng dared not really look at him. However, as the two of them walked back up towards the top floor and they could see in the distance their companions laughing and horsing around, she suddenly halted her steps.

“Mo Qingcheng...” Unexpectedly, she darted in front of him and turned around to face him.

He gave her a puzzled look.

She stared at him with 70% apprehensiveness... and 100% embarrassment.

He grew even more perplexed, a smile adorning the corner of his eyes and brows.

The most captivating thing about Gu Sheng was that all her emotions would, without any restraint, be completely displayed on her face and in her eyes. She was twenty-two years old now. How did she manage to be so open and authentic, yet get through life safe and sound without getting tricked or taken advantage of these last twenty-two years?

He could not hold back a faint smile.

Seeming to have worked up her determination, she stretched her hand out and gently wiped his lips.

He understood now, so he stood very quietly, looking down at her and letting her destroy all the evidence.

Once, twice ... Anyway, it took several swipes before his lips were completely clean.

The lipstick... was applied very thickly indeed...

“Is it clean now?” he asked in a low tone, his voice filled with mirth.

“Mm.” Acting as if nothing had happened, she turned around and started walking again. With difficulty ... she kept moving forward. Even though she had wiped it clean herself, she still felt guiltily uneasy, fearing that there might still be something left on his lips...

“Sheng Sheng, you still haven’t removed your make-up?” The make-up artist was standing in the hallway making casual conversation with someone when she saw her walking towards them. Immediately, she pulled out her make-up remover and facial cleansing milk and handed it to Gu Sheng. “How come so much of your lipstick is gone? Did you ingest it?”

.....

“Huh? It’s gone?” Gu Sheng used the back of her hand to wipe at her mouth, pretending to act nonchalant.

Mu Mu took a glance at her and then very professionally and sincerely advised, “That type of stuff isn’t good for you to consume. Next time, try not to ingest so much.”

.....

Okay, people, could we stop discussing the topic about ingesting or not ingesting? T.T.....

Everyone then took the topic from how the lipstick on Gu Sheng’s lips managed to get eaten away, to ingesting lipstick was very bad for you, to some lipsticks were made from natural botanical materials and seemed safe to ingest... and finally to... in the future, they should develop a line of lipsticks called “Lovers’ Lipstick” that was specifically designed to be ingested...

She was there in the restroom, rapidly removing her make-up with the aid of the make-up artist and listening through the wall while the topic expanded to this extent. Silently, she endured this, holding it all in until she was nearly going to die of internal injuries...

Mo Qingcheng seemed to be in a good mood.

Apart from when they had been out on the terrace taking photographs and he had been scowling, he was actually saying more than he normally did. However, that, too, was still limited to when he was talking with Mo Bai and Mu Mu... To everyone else, he was definitely someone who innately kept away from the female gender, someone who could only be observed from a distance with no chance of anyone getting close enough to start a conversation.

◉\_\_◉b

In regards to this... Why was it the Toupai she knew was forever affable and warm and always took the initiative? ...

Under Mo Bai's persistent wheedling and pestering, in the end, their couple's dinner date completely turned into McDonald's + karaoke night, and on top of that, it was with a crowd. After taking photos together, joking and complaining together, changing in and out of costumes together, and chatting away together over a tray of French fries in McDonald's, this group of people, which only a few hours ago had been strangers to one another, had successfully gotten to know each other.

However, after listening to people sing in the private karaoke room for only one hour but hearing the three words, "Qiang Qing Ci" spoken more than a dozen times, she finally realized there was something very wrong.

She was Sheng Sheng Man. Beside her was Qiang Qing Ci.

She was an ancient-style singer. Toupai was a voice actor who could sing better than most singers.

Even though, right from the beginning, they had already colluded with Mu Mu and Mo Bai to keep their 2-D world identities a secret, wouldn't they be exposed once the microphone was put in front of them? ... Glancing at the person beside her, she took a sip of her milk tea. The tapioca pearls shot up the straw and slid into her mouth...

"I want to sing 'Drunken Dream in Divine Rain'!" There were two young girls huddled together at the counter where they could request songs, and

there were another two standing behind them giving instructions.

“Can you sing those high notes?”

“Doesn’t matter. I just want to sing it to commemorate that this was the first song my Toupai DaRen sang.” The girl choosing songs immediately flaunted her status as a senior Qiang Qing Ci fan...

Gu Sheng successfully managed to... swallow her two tapioca pearls whole.

Mo Qingcheng was calm as always.

“Want to hear me sing?” The voice beside her suddenly put forward this wonderful, yet dangerous suggestion.

Yes... of course she wanted to...

In the glow of the continuously flashing strobe lights, she looked at him somewhat uneasily. Thinking over it for a few seconds, she brought her lips up against his ear and said quietly, “Qiang Qing Ci Dada, aren’t you afraid of being found out?”

He smiled and also lowered his voice to reply, “Sheng Sheng Man Dada, as a voice actor, to be able to change and use a variety of voices is a basic skill.”

..... Alright. Touche. He got her.

Since the name, Qiang Qing Ci had first made its appearance in voice acting, aside from his voice’s ability to strike straight into the heart of the listener, the aspect that generated the most praise was his talent to create a wide variety of different voices. As long as it was not too much of an out-of-the-ordinary type of role, he would completely be able to handle it.

How could she forget? He was Qiang Qing Ci, ah.

◉\_\_◉b

After the girls had all settled on their songs, he walked over and started to choose.

As he stood there at the counter where songs were requested, his head

lowered, looking over the list of songs, more than half the crowd's eyes lit up. Who didn't like a handsome guy? And when a handsome guy dared to go up to request a song to sing, that meant his singing was definitely not bad! But the key point was, to this entire room of girls, of which half were voice lovers, this was a huge enticement.

Plus ...

When they spied the song names he had selected, their blood immediately seemed to start burning.

It was Chinese style! This handsome guy was a kindred spirit! You could find people who could sing pop music all over the world, you know? But someone who could sing ancient-style songs well was a rare gem, k? Did you think just anybody could sing ancient-style songs? Tell the guy next to you to give it a try and you'd know!

“Um... can I feebly ask you, DaRen, do you know how to sing ‘Drunken Dream in Divine Rain’?.....”

The senior Qiang Qing Ci fan suddenly came up with this idea and very eagerly presented this song request.

He smiled and shook his head.

This KTV was not really up to date with the times and had very few ancient-style songs that had been released online. Most of the ancient-style songs were actually Chinese style songs that had been released by pop singers. Finally, he chose the most recently released one in the list, “Hong Chen Ke Zhan” [Red Dust Inn or Worldly Inn]. He had just finished deciding on his selection and then the girls who had been picking songs before him immediately declared generously, “Please skip over ours and give first priority to the handsome guy...”

The result was, the song he had just requested was brought up the queue to be the next song.

Gu Sheng nibbled on the straw of her milk tea and listened as the introduction gradually started playing. She was lightly holding her breath... When he had sang to the crowd on YY, he had used his natural

voice, so now, even she could not help wondering what it would be like when he used another voice to sing...

[[<https://youtu.be/L6joGUdc6y4>]]

Until the microphone was turned on.

Until his first note appeared. Until, still biting on her straw, her breath was completely taken away.

[2:08] “Under the eaves, the twigs slant across the lattice window

We sit on the ground sipping tea

I use Gongbi painting to etch you in my heart

I put pen to paper, but not for literary pursuits...[1]”

The imposing boldness and emperor’s aura of “Drunken Dream in Divine Rain” and “Overturn the World” had been put away. His voice had completely changed. Regardless of whether one was considering vocal quality or emotional interpretation, he had completely integrated himself into the song.

The majestic feeling was gone. It was a completely clean, simple voice.

Far from the tumult of the world of men ...

So beautiful. She thought of the saying “turn the world upside down in fervor[2].”

He was singing, she was listening. The rest of the people were merely sideline spectators.

Every person who heard him was captivated, but nobody could tell he was Qiang Qing Ci.

In fact, even when he had finished singing, all those voice lovers present did not forget to follow up and ask if he wanted to be a CV or a cover singer. They were as excited as if they had just dug up the most valuable treasure on the earth. Mo Bai, who was watching this from the side, nearly gave himself an internal injury from laughing so hard and hurriedly stuffed him back to Gu Sheng. Mo Qingcheng took a look at his

watch. "The air in here feels stuffy. Want to go out for a walk?"

The fun was at its peak in this place, so if two people left, it should be fine, right?

She quietly set her milk tea on the table and answered softly, "Okay. I'm just going to go to the restroom. Wait for me at the main entrance."

When she finished saying this, she picked up her bag and ran out of the room first.

She had to say, the décor of the KTV was very European in style. The restrooms were facing a wall of mirrors, and walking along, there were different doors that lead into different hallways. Through various doors, voices could be heard as they sang, and no sooner had the sound of one subsided, another would arise. She quickly washed her face and hands, fixed her hair, and walked back outside, where she glanced at herself in the mirror.

She blinked her eyes a few times.

Mm-hmm. Looking pretty good...

She was just about to turn around when in the mirror, she saw Mo Qingcheng standing in the hallway leading towards the exit, his hands in his pockets, watching her with a smile on his lips... It was apparent he had discovered the girly thought she had had as she looked in the mirror.

How long had he been watching?

No idea...

Really, she hadn't been looking in the mirror that long, right?

.....

The two of them took the elevator downstairs. Out of habit, he popped a throat lozenge into his mouth. It seemed that many CVs and singers had this same habit. Actually... she wanted to say, it was not that good to always take them, right? You could become dependent on them...

Even though they were in the downtown, the KTV was actually in a quiet location amongst the busyness, situated on the top floor of a



business high-rise building, and as a result, there were not many people when they exited the building.

Not many people and not many cars, but still very brightly lit.

When she stepped outside, she happened to be in a particularly windy spot. Very chilly.

While she was looking around trying to determine where the nearest bus station was, two young women pushed open the glass doors of the building. He quickly pulled her out of the way to avoid that transparent glass door. His warm hands were enclosed around her wrists while her back was against the outer glass wall of the building.

Behind her, the lights shone brilliantly, tracing out the outline of her face while illuminating his.

Because it was cold or something like that, she felt that she was much warmer here, leaning like this against the wall with him in front shielding her.

But this position they were in...

She cast a quick look at the security guard who was inside the glass doors on the other side of her ... Feeling a little awkward and timid, she turned back and asked a random, irrelevant question. "Do you know... is there any bus route around here that will take me back to my school? ..." Or... the metro would do, too...

She was still searching around with her eyes for a bus stop when, without any warning, he lowered his head. "Yes, I do."

The tip of his nose brushed against the tip of hers. And then, very naturally, he found her lips. The tip of his tongue slipped in, then tentatively gave her some time to grow accustomed to what was happening. One second, two seconds.

How in the world could she get accustomed to this?

His breath felt scorching. Her head was spinning. This time, it really was... for real.

There she was, pressed by him like this against the glass wall with no choice but to tilt her head upward.

The taste of the lozenge. The crisp scent of mint. Did... he do it on purpose...?

Scattered fragments of thoughts were trying with all their might to come together, but his enticing would break them apart so that they could not form a complete sentence. What technique? Her tongue was being tantalized and lightly sucked and even brought into his mouth where he gently held it.

Such an intimate form of interaction, but it had unexpectedly happened here.

Everything intermingled with the sound of cars driving by and the smell of the trees beside the road...

“Where, where? ...” From far away, someone was crying with such excitement it sounded as if she was watching an idol drama.

Gu Sheng clearly heard that voice speaking, and she abruptly pushed against his chest.

Her push did separate them, but using that momentum, he pulled her head in to rest against his shoulder and embraced her in that position... Those bright eyes were clearly tilted up in a smile. “What did you just ask me?”

Her heart was still floating around in her chest, rocking and swaying.

She buried her face into his shoulder like an ostrich, hiding her mouth and nose from view and barely peeking her eyes out to watch the two passersby gradually walk away into the distance. She mumbled quietly, “Didn’t you say that you know? ...”

Her first kiss, ah... And it was out in an open, public place and even had spectators...

“I know?” He pondered briefly, reaching into his pocket and pulling out another throat lozenge. Tossing it into his mouth, he said in a voice made

unclear by the candy, “Oh right, we were talking about busses... There are no direct bus routes around here. You can only take the metro.”

.....

.....

Then why did you say you knew?

Don't tell me, you weren't really thinking and just said whatever came to mind? ...

After a little while, he patted her lightly on her back, indicating that it was okay for them to leave now.

Gu Sheng immediately recovered her ability to think and process properly again. She slipped herself out of his arms, wanting only to hurry up and leave this place. Who cared whether it was by bus or metro or plane? ... If he suddenly felt like he wanted to have another go at it and at the same time, the people upstairs happened to get bored and want to leave early, she absolutely would not ever dare face his two friends again...

\*

[1] Credit to <http://www.chinasmack.com/2013/more/chinese-pop-songs/red-dust-inn-by-jay-chou-zhou-jielun.html>. Check out the site for a full translation of the song.

[2]颠倒红尘. Literally, to turn the “red dust” upside down. 红尘 or “red dust” means the human/mundane/mortal world. 颠倒 means “to turn upside down” literally, but it can mean to bring confusion and chaos to something. At times, it is used to describe when someone is losing their mind. In this case, Gu Sheng is thinking, Toupai's singing is so beautiful that it can cause people to lose their minds (go crazy with love for it). Apologies for the terribly unpoetic translation in the main text of the translation.

# Chapter 41: Salt and Pepper Mushrooms

## (4)

Gu Sheng and Mo Qingcheng were intensely and passionately immersed in their relationship.

However, on the Internet, these two had decided, in an unspoken agreement, to completely go into hiding. Sheng Sheng Man, because she was now dating Qiang Qing Qi, disappeared. There was no fanfare nor flaunting of how in love they were..... More accurately, from beginning to end, Sheng Sheng Man had never flaunted anything about being in love. Ever since that one comment of “I am so happy” had resulted in the masses lining up to surround her as spectators, she had disappeared. Besides forwarding the songs of good friends, all she would do was forward her own songs, making her Weibo account seem more like an account used for marketing and publicity...

Keeping a low profile was very good. A low profile meant no mistakes could be made.

If it were anyone else, that person would have been jumping up and down everyday, parading her love out for everyone within a 360o radius to see. Hence, a portion of Toupai’s fan base gradually started to think that their idol’s judgment in choosing a girlfriend was actually pretty good, ah.

Of course, the other part still acted as if she did not exist...

“A mountain may not move, but its waters do[1].” What if one day they broke up?

Then Toupai would belong to everyone again.

Naturally, where there was an entertainment circle, there was gossip.

It was not known which new member of Wanmei leaked the news that Qiang Qing Ci would be officially announcing his retirement from the entertainment circle at Wanmei’s anniversary celebration event, but straightaway all sorts of rumours started to spread. Although he had faded out of the limelight for a long time now, every year he would at

least still participate in an insignificant role in a radio drama for Wanmei, and while he did not have the time to take on a main role, any drama he took part in was still absolutely one of the big dramas of the year that garnered the most attention.

However, if he really did retire from the online entertainment circle, then they really would only be able to hear him in commercial projects.

As a result, everyone's emotions started to boil again, believing that Sheng Sheng Man was one who got jealous easily and she had influenced Toupai, telling their DaRen to retire from the online entertainment world. Rumours could be so scary T.T...

Gu Sheng shut down her QQ, deciding in the end not to look at the posts Zou Diao'er and her association president had sent over.

Actually, she really did not care. And Toupai even more so did not care about being badmouthed... The only thing she was nervous about was Ling Long Ti Tou's invitation to her to compose a song. When the song was actually released, it would definitely bring about a great commotion...

She stuffed her headphones on her head, deciding to compose the song and worry about it later. As for the rest... worry about those later, too.

Her mobile phone had many ancient-style songs in it, and while she was reading through the lyrics that had already been completed by the lyricist, she listened to them to get inspiration for her composing. A gentle breeze blew in through the open bus window. In the blink of an eye, it was early summer already... Because of the busy nature of Toupai DaRen's work, their dating life had very quickly fallen into a rhythm.

Twice a week, she would go to his home for dinner, otherwise known as "breaking the veggie fast with meat[2]."

He would then drive her back to the university. Of course, that was when he was not busy. During the times he was busy, she would leisurely catch the bus back to her school. Then, they would wait again until he managed to have half a day of free time, when they would go... um, all over to dig up good eats.

(◕◕)

Such a harmonious dating life...

When she arrived at his apartment, out of habit, she rang the doorbell, but after waiting a long time without the door being opened, she finally remembered that Mo Qingcheng had cut an extra key and given it to her. In that moment of pulling it out of her bag and opening the door, she actually felt like she was being a thief. After all, Jue Mei lived here as well, ah...

Who would have expected that, when she pushed open the door, Jue Mei would already be on the other side, grinning as he handed a glass of orange juice to her? "Toupai DaRen wouldn't let me open the door. He said, every time, you don't use the key, so you need to get into the habit."

.....

Alright. From the kitchen, the splashing sounds of hot oil could be heard.

She took the orange juice in her hand, smiled at Jue Mei, and then immediately, like a very good girl, ran into the kitchen.

When she stepped in and washed her hands, Toupai was using cool water to rinse and cool down some mushrooms that had already been cooked in hot water. While waiting for the mushrooms to cool, he said, "I'm making salt and pepper mushrooms for you." His voice was light and relaxed as it wafted into her ear.

Gu Sheng answered with an "mm" and was even more docile.

What was this feeling, where the instant she heard his voice, she would wag her tail? T.T ...

Was it going to be like this their entire lives? ...

She stood beside him, watching as he took the mushrooms that had been torn into thin strips and squeezed the excess water from them. He then added an egg and some flour into a porcelain dish and mixed these together evenly with the mushrooms. "Would you like it if I add some

five-spice powder?”

“Mm.” She continued her tail wagging.

She watched Toupai add the five-spice powder and another egg before continuing to stir and stir, stir and stir...

What was this feeling, where just looking at the mushrooms covered in paste caused her mouth to salivate? T.T ...

Was it really going to be like this their entire lives? ...

Poof. Burner turned on, oil heated up, mushrooms into the wok.

The mushrooms were quickly fried until they were cooked through, and then they were taken out and placed onto a plate. Mo Qingcheng opened a glass cabinet, and from a row of more than a dozen bottles of spices and seasonings, he pulled out the bottle of salt and pepper seasoning and sprinkled it evenly over the mushrooms.

Ok, done~

With great approval, Gu Sheng picked up the dish and inhaled deeply. It smelled so good, aah.

She squinted her eyes in satisfaction and turned around. However, when she started to head out of the kitchen, Toupai, who was behind her, pulled her back. In a very low voice, he told her, “You’re allowed to steal a couple bites first. It tastes best when it’s freshly fried.”

That wouldn’t be kind, would it? ...

Poor Jue Mei...

She had not finished sighing over this when Toupai stretched out his hand and, not even bothering to use chopsticks, picked up a piece of mushroom between his middle and ring finger. And like that, openly and unabashedly, he brought it up to her lips... Gu Sheng felt guiltily embarrassed and straightaway opened her mouth and ate it.

“Taste good?” he asked softly.

“Very good.” Her eyes narrowed together. She wanted more...

Sure enough, Toupai fed her another piece.

So, so delicious...

Licking her lips, she was about to comment that she had never thought that mushrooms could taste so good when she saw Mo Qingcheng casually bring his fingers to his lips and lick away the salt and pepper seasoning on them. “Not bad.”

She had this same habit of licking her fingers after eating any food that had spices or seasonings on it...

He glanced at the mushrooms but seemed to think that picking up another piece after he had licked his fingers would not be very appropriate.

Gu Sheng felt her heart melt when she saw his gaze and so, she also stealthily picked up a piece and brought it toward him.

Her fingers were up next to his lips.

When the mushroom was eaten, she pulled her fingers back and looked down at the salt and pepper on her hands.

Before she had finished hesitating, he had already caught her hand in his and pulled it up to his lips. Gently, his tongue brushed across the tips of her fingers. “It tastes pretty good. Shouldn’t waste it.” His voice was low and soft. Soooo soul-melting.

.....

Her fingertips felt like they had just had an electric shock. Numb and tingly...

Her heart was also numb and tingly...

“Did you miss me?” Mo Qingcheng continued to ask her in a soft tone.

“Mm...”

His brows furrowed, meaning that was an incorrect answer.

“Mm-hmm. Missed...”

“How much did you miss me?” He continued to guide her words.



.....

Oh no. All the adjectives she knew seemed to have left her brain completely.

“Really, really missed...”

He smiled. “Who did you miss?”

“You...”

“Now put it all together and say it.” He lowered his voice some more and even the last sound of his sentence seemed to rise up slightly in pitch...

“..... Really, really missed you.”

T.T.....

That’s just so bad of him...

Who forces someone to say lovey-dovey words? ...

Mo Qingcheng appeared to be very satisfied with the results of his instructing and finally started to make the next dish while telling her to bring the salt and pepper mushrooms out of the kitchen. Even when they were well into dinner, she was still deep in pondering over one particular matter:

You say, how come Toupai was a completely different person in front of other people than when there was no one else around? T.T.....

\*

[1]山不转水转 “shan bu zhuan shui zhuan.” Things are never all static. Even if a mountain does not move, the streams on it do. Nothing is fixed in stone and unchanging.

[2]开荤 “kai hun.” Compared to the days they cannot see each other or have dinner together (the veggie diet), being able to share a meal is special (like getting to eat meat again).

# Chapter 42: “Splendid” Rice with Pickled Vegetables and Pork (1)

After dinner, she pulled out some fruits from the refrigerator, washed any that required washing, cut them up, and stabbed some toothpicks into them. She handed a small plate of the prepared fruit to Jue Mei and then brought another large plate into Mo Qingcheng’s room.

When Gu Sheng walked in, he was already sitting in front of his desktop computer and wearing his headset. Every time he put on his headset, he had a habit where he would only turn on a single desk lamp, as if this way he would be completely transported into a different world and be free from distraction.

The warm orange glow of the light cast his entire shadow onto the wall. Quiet, calm, and not troubled by anything.

He was honestly so handsome when he was wearing his headset, ah...

Gu Sheng stared at him in starry-eyed silence for a moment.

By now, Mo Qingcheng had noticed she had come inside the room. He tilted his head to the side to glance at her, then brought his index finger to his lips in a gesture that indicated she should remain quiet. She nodded and then noiselessly walked over, setting the plate down in front of him. Pointing at the fruit on the plate, she motioned to him that when he had the time, he should eat some.

He nodded.

Gu Sheng grabbed a strawberry off the plate and stuffed it into her mouth. Sitting down on the sofa behind him, she opened up his laptop, logged in with her alternate ID, and entered the YY room.

Tonight was the night that the final results of the voice acting competition were going to be announced. To put it frankly, this was basically the collective curtain call for all the winners, and they would give a final closing performance. These people, who had managed to ultimately triumph over everyone else, were no longer unknowns, and

many had even become extremely popular now. In the previous rounds of the competition, they had been highlights, and now as they all gathered together, they were not simply highlights but a vast sky of shining stars.

And he, tonight, was part of the judging panel that was sitting in as spectators. However, as long as Qiang Qing Ci's ID merely hung there silently in the YY room, it was already sufficient.

In the room below, there were, of course, several thousand fans and the ten top-level administrators all accompanying him, making no noise and causing no disturbance, simply quietly accompanying and listening with him.

As for her...

As soon as she entered the 2-D world, she would immediately revert to the mindset she had as his hardcore fangirl.

Here before the ID, "Qiang Qing Ci," her heart would start to race and she would still be that Sheng Sheng Man ... This feeling ... was truly very remarkable.

Inside her headset, a girl, who was one of the twelve winners, was singing. As she listened, Gu Sheng pushed herself up on the armrest of the sofa and reached for the strawberries on the plate. Her hand crossed in front of him, and just as it touched one, he noticed her. With a smile, he picked out the biggest one on the plate and placed it in her hand.

Sticking her tongue out impishly, she retreated back into the sofa and continued munching.

When she had taken a couple bites, the girl had finished singing.

Her singing was truthfully quite good.

She silently gave her approval.

"Congratulations to our Jin Xiu Ru Hui [Beautiful As Ashes]," the hostess said with a smile in her voice before starting to move into the next segment of the program. "Well then..."

"May I express some thoughts to the judges?" the girl suddenly

interrupted the hostess.

The hostess right away laughed and replied, "Absolutely, you may. I was wondering why no one making any love declarations tonight. Could it be I'm acting overly serious and everyone's forgotten how to throw their dignity out the window?"

The girl gave a cough and was slightly embarrassed. "Because Teacher Qiang Qing Ci was only a judge in two of the competition rounds, I never got a chance to cross paths with him..."

"Oh yes, Qiang Qing Ci Dada is just too busy," the hostess jokingly complained. "From the preliminary rounds to the finals, we spanned a period of four months, but we were only able to get two days of his time. Luckily, luckily, he made it out to this last round tonight. Little sister, add oil and go make your confession. Oh wait, that won't do. I remember Toupai has his own little golden master now. Your confession will need to be more reserved now, dear."

From the instant she had specifically stated the name Qiang Qing Ci, comments had started furiously flooding the public comment screen. They had not expected that the hostess would mention "little golden master" in front of tens of thousands of listeners, as if she was worried that the world would not fall into chaos ...

"No, no." She was already a well-known CV but still she could not help feeling anxious when it came to her idol. "It's a very serious and proper confession. Absolutely no horsing around in it."

The hostess laughed and indicated to her that she should continue.

Gu Sheng was listening. There were several seconds of silence in her headphones. She stole a glimpse at Toupai. The person on the receiving end of the confession was very composed...

"It's like this ... Um, let me first ask, Qiang Qing Ci Dada, are you listening? You wouldn't be logged in but not really listening, would you? ..."

"I'm here." His voice was neither loud nor soft, just light and calm.

“It’s like this, Dada. Since I was a child, I’ve liked listening to the radio and had always had a dream for broadcasting, wanting either to be a professional broadcaster or a voice actor. But because of certain circumstances, when I had my university entrance exams, I ended up missing the opportunity to get into the specialty school. So ... I have always had regrets about this.” A faint sense of sadness could even be heard in the girl’s voice. “Later, a close girlfriend found out about this dream of mine, so she told me that she frequently listened to Internet radio dramas. Even though those were mainly amateur works or done for fun as a hobby, there were a few outstanding people who ended up becoming commercial voice actors. To be honest, at first, I kind of looked down on this, thinking it was just a way to please the audience with a bunch of fluff ... until my good friend let me listen to one of your works, and then I was completely convinced. And so, what I want to say is, Toupai DaRen, thank you for bringing me into this entertainment circle and becoming my goal and aspiration.”

Gu Sheng was biting down on the strawberry in her hand, but she still had not eaten it yet.

The owner of the ID, Qiang Qing Ci was actually sitting right there with his back towards her and within her reach. But yet, that name still carried an immense enticement. This name represented all of the characters he had once voiced and the works he had made, and it was the bright sunlight to many people who had never studied voice acting in a specialized school but still carried in their hearts a voice acting dream.

You cannot renounce the people who genuinely like voice acting simply because there are some thrown in the mix who only want to play around and have some fun.

These people may only have a few dozen fans and do not dazzle the listeners like the big name celebrities, but so long as they like what they are doing, there is nothing that cannot be accomplished. Just like this girl.

She was suddenly very touched.

She understood this feeling. It was like when she had listened to her first ancient-style song and her breath had been taken away.

That one short moment of having your breath taken away can completely change the course of a person's life.

How many people had he changed?

The number should be very impressive.

"Thank you. I wish you success," he said lightly with a smile, "May you be even more successful than me."

Like a gentle, yet compelling force, his voice penetrated through headsets and into everyone's ears.

T.T..... Just like that, that's it?...

Even I've been moved by what she said, you know? Can you not say a few more words to her?

But in front of the public, he had always been this way ...

When it was time for the next performance, she saw Qiang Qing Ci shut off his YY microphone and knew that she could finally speak. Right away, she set down her computer, pushed herself up on the arm of the sofa, and patted him on the shoulder. The person in front of her turned his head and pulled off his headphones, a slightly inquisitive look in his eyes.

She looked at him.

She looked at those gorgeous, large eyes of his...

Silently, she brainwashed herself: this is Mo Qingcheng, not Qiang Qing Ci...

"I was particularly touched when I was listening just now." She still felt as if her heart was full of things that needed to be expressed. Picking up a strawberry, she held it in front of his mouth. "Why didn't you say a couple sentences more to her?"

Mo Qingcheng smiled, opened his mouth, and bit into the strawberry

she had brought up to him. “Habit. If I said too much, it actually would have been bad for her.”

She suddenly understood. He was referring to the fact that some of his fans would definitely feel that Toupai was especially favouring that girl and that might end up drawing a widespread attack on her or something along those lines ... Or they would say the girl’s confession had actually been staged and her true motive was to “hug a thigh”?

T.T.....

She thought about her poor ID that had been badmouthed into a grave: Sheng Sheng Man.

Mo Qingcheng seemed to all of a sudden remember something and picked up his mobile phone from the table. His arm wrapped around her back and half-encircled her in his embrace as he opened up Weibo. Countless numbers of messages immediately popped up in the “Messages” section of his Weibo and basically, they were ... all love confessions and declarations. All sorts of confessions: indirect and reserved ones, intense and charged ones, tender ones, frank and direct ones ...

“I normally don’t allow strangers to @ me and only accept the ones from my friends. My private messaging function is also shut off. This messages section seems to be a new function. See, I always receive stuff like this.” He explained in a low tone, “I used to think, if I got a girlfriend and she saw this, I bet she would be furious and part ways with me.”

.....

Alright, fine. She was already a teeny-tiny bit jealous T.T.....

“That’s why...” he chuckled, but right as he was about to say something, he stopped.

It just so happened that a new @ had popped up in his notifications. She glanced at the name. It was a very well-known illustrator and was also one of Qiang Qing Ci’s friends. He had hand-drawn a chibi cartoon of Qiang Qing Ci, wearing a set of headphones, holding a strawberry in

his hand, and feeding... a little gold-coloured pig that was in his embrace...



Left side: Qiang Qing Ci. Right side: There are tens of thousands of beauties in the world, but Toupai loves only that little golden pig, oh the little golden pig.

The artist did not forget to include a teasing sentence in his post: There are tens of thousands of beauties in the world, but Toupai loves only that little golden pig[1], oh the little golden pig...

.....

.....

Why had she become a gold pig? ...

Hey, wait! How come it was such a coincidence that it was a strawberry that was being fed? ...

Before she had finished mulling this over, Toupai had already cheerfully pressed re-post and typed @ShengShengMan: Thanks, but Little Golden Pig is actually not chubby. She can be considered... the type of waist that is so slender it's "just enough to fill the hands[2]."

.....



.....

Really, that slim?

Wait..... ( ◉ o ◉ ) .....

When have you ever held it in your hands?....

\*

[1] 小金猪 “xiao jin zhu1.” The illustrator is playing on similar sounding words. 小金猪 xiao jin zhu1 “little golden pig” sounds very similar to 小金主 xiao jin zhu3 “little golden master.”

[2] 盈盈一握 ‘ying ying yi wo.’ The first two characters 盈盈 mean “to fill up.” The last two characters一握 mean “a handful.” So, in describing a woman’s waist, it is a form of praise by saying she is so slender her waist can be completely encircled by only two hands. (Join the fingers of your hands together so that your hands make a circle. Imagine fitting a waist in that circle... That type of slender! Meant to be an exaggeration, of course.)

\*

Additional Comments:

“That’s why...” what? What do you think Toupai was going to say?

## Chapter 43: “Splendid” Rice with Pickled Vegetables and Pork (2)

“That’s why I must very clearly let people know, I have a girlfriend.” Mo Qingcheng set his phone down off to the side and made his concluding statement. “That will prevent a whole bunch of unnecessary problems.”

That was why... he was so high-profile about it?.....

Such a thoughtful person.

Probably every girl has had this dream, that the person you like is a celebrity in other people’s eyes, yet he very plainly tells everyone that he belongs to you ... When a woman flaunts her happiness, it causes the other women around her to be envious, but when a man flaunts his happiness, it causes all the women in the world to be envious ...

Men actually very rarely flaunted their happiness for people to see.

She was still feeling touched by this when she felt something warm on her waist. Mo Qingcheng was really using his hands to measure. “Sure enough, just as I thought: just enough to fill the hands.”

Using his hands to measure her waist.

Such a romantically evocative action, like skin-to-skin contact ... Gu Sheng was still caught up in the warmth of her emotions, and unconsciously, she raised her head to look up at him. His eyes were such a deep black, reflecting the light of the desk lamp. The contours of his nose bridge and jawline were so smooth, as if they had been drawn with a single stroke of a brush.

So ridiculously beautiful.

She was looking at him and was also being looked at by him.

And then, with a smile, he stuffed an earbud into her right ear.

He opened up the Duomi music player[1] on his mobile phone, and then just like that, a familiar melody started playing.

[[<https://youtu.be/n9t9WF8sTu8>]]

It was himself, Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen, gently singing “Ruo Xiang Xi” [If We Had Cherished]. So soft and tender, so relaxed, as if he was singing for only her to listen:

[1:13] “How many regrets of parting were found in the dreams of last night?

The twittering of the swallows on colorful rafters disturb the remnants of those dreams The moon hangs at an angle above the river. Oars move. The morning bell.

The dream is a blur. The sound of waves gradually fades away into the distance.

The sound of the flute is unhurried. Spring leaves hurriedly...”

A scene was there before her eyes, appearing because of the song: a limestone pathway, the sound of the morning bell and evening drum, mist pervading the air, and the sound of a flute leisurely playing.

“When did you record this? ...”

“A few days ago.”

“For one of your association’s events? Or a birthday blessing?...”

“For you,” Mo Qingcheng could not help smiling. “Besides Wanmei’s anniversary celebration, I haven’t participated in any types of those events for several years already, and I don’t record birthday or event well wishes anymore.”

Oh, right...

She had forgotten about that.

There seemed to be something in her chest that was slowly spreading outward, a feeling so warm she could not restrain a smile from rising up onto her face.

“I recorded ten songs,” he continued telling her. “All ancient-style.”

She gave an “mm” in reply.

Then, after thinking for a moment, she reached over, felt for a strawberry, and fed it to him. “To reward you.”

As he munched on the strawberry, Mo Qingcheng could not help laughing. His voice indistinct because of the strawberry in his mouth, he complained, “With just one strawberry?”

Gu Sheng also felt she was being stingy, so she immediately added, “Tomorrow, I’ll go buy you lots and lots of goodies to eat...”

Before her words were finished, the sound of her voice faded ...

He had “fed” himself and the strawberry he had been eating straight into her mouth, almost half-forcing her to consume it. The sweet and fragrant flavour spread between their lips and teeth. When he finally pulled himself away from her lips, he could not help licking his own lips. “That strawberry was pretty good. Very sweet.”

.....

.....

She was the one who had basically eaten it all, k?

Gu Sheng nibbled on her own lip and stole a look at him. Picking up the plate, she went to the kitchen to wash the remaining strawberries that were in the refrigerator and bring them back for him to eat. Mo Qingcheng nonchalantly picked up his headphones and continued listening to the competition’s finals performance...

The moment she walked into the kitchen, Jue Mei Sha Yi ran out from his own room and set his small plate that was now empty on the table. “Little Golden Master, I finished mine, too.” Gu Sheng suddenly understood. It must have been Jue Mei who, while eating his strawberries, had... casually gossiped with that artist, and that was how that picture came about.

This practice of the entire country watching Toupai date his girlfriend...

Who was the one who started it? T.T ...

Outside, the wind suddenly picked up.

By the time she placed the freshly replenished plate of strawberries beside Toupai's hand, the gusting wind had already changed over into a torrential downpour.

When Mo Qingcheng heard the clap of thunder, he remembered that he had lent his car to Wk. He looked out at the wind and rainstorm. Neither taking the metro nor the bus would be very convenient in this weather. His eyes turned toward Gu Sheng, and it seemed as if he was mulling over something. "The rain is coming down so hard. It won't be very easy for you to get back. How about staying here tonight?"

That did not seem very appropriate. She tried to think of another option...

"If it's still raining this hard by ten o'clock, then stay here." Mo Qingcheng carried on, "You can sleep in my room. I'll go sleep with Jue Mei."

That seemed... still not very appropriate...

She continued to wrestle with herself over it.

"I have to get up very early tomorrow morning. When you wake up, you can head back to school yourself."

Huh? He had to get up early?

Oh, right! He needs to get up early. If I head back so late, he'll definitely accompany me. Going there and back, out in the gusting wind and pouring rain will be so exhausting.

"Don't worry, I won't do anything." He even gave his promise.

Gu Sheng struggled for a little while longer but finally agreed.

When you are about to sleep in a room, that room will definitely take on a different meaning and significance to you.

For example, the feeling she got from seeing the light blue blanket covering Mo Qingcheng was completely different from the one she had when she was lying under it herself ... In a state of confusion and turmoil, Gu Sheng finished up her shower. Wearing the button-up shirt and sweat

pants he had given her, with the sleeves and pant legs rolled up three or four times, she stood by the bed and stared blankly at it for a long while before finally sitting down on it.

It was soft. As soon as she laid on it, she sank right in.

He liked sleeping on soft mattresses? Why had she never noticed this before? ... That actually wasn't very good for the spine... Gu Sheng's thoughts were jumbled as she pricked up her ears to listen to the sounds in the next room. It was quiet.

He should have gone to bed already?

But, the soundproofing here in their place was very good, so even if they were not sleeping, she would not be able to hear anything, right?

She turned off the wall lamp at the head of the bed. The room fell into pitch-blackness, and there was only the sound of heavy rain outside the window. She sniffed. The blanket smelled like him, a light scent, slightly fragrant. The instant she thought about the fact that this bed was his, she, for some reason, would grow anxious... especially while she was wearing his shirt and sweat pants... T.T ...

She couldn't sleep at all, you know? ...

Battling between the two ideas of "sit up and go play on the computer" and "knock it off and just sleep," she dozed off. She was one who did not adjust well when sleeping in a bed other than her own, and as a result, her slumber was rather restless. After several vivid but chaotic dreams, she was suddenly startled out of her sleep by something. Carefully, she tried to sense what it was. It seemed someone had entered the room...

She immediately tensed. Rolling over lightly, she tried to boost her own courage.

“

“Did I wake you?” Mo Qingcheng's voice was right there beside the bed. Bending over, he explained quietly, “Jue Mei is too noisy in his sleep, and he kicks, too, so I came back...”

“Mm...” She grasped the covers lightly.

“You go back to sleep. I’ll go sleep on the couch,” he told her softly with a smile.

The little details of the expression on his face could not be seen. He was only a silhouette outlined in the dark. In this moment, his voice seemed even more mysterious and captivating, carrying in it an obvious sense of drowsiness. Extremely captivating.

So close.

So close that you dared not speak.

“How about... you sleep on the bed and I’ll sleep on the couch? You have to go to work tomorrow. It’ll be too exhausting if you sleep on the couch,” she suggested softly.

“No, it’s alright.” He stroked her hand that was gripping the blanket. “Sleep now.”

A tone like he was coaxing a little child to bed.

When he finished saying this, he walked to the closet, pulled out an extra blanket and pillow, and went to sleep on the sofa.

As for when he actually fell asleep, she was not too certain. All she knew was, after he came back into the room to rest, she slept even more nervously. That sort of anxiety, where you were worried that the way you looked when you slept was embarrassing or that you would make strange noises when you were asleep, lasted all the way until the morning light began to show... The second Mo Qingcheng’s mobile phone alarm rang, he immediately shut it off and sat up.

At the same time, as if she had finally been set free, she also sat right up.

It’s just five o’clock.” Mo Qingcheng let out an amused chuckle when he saw her like this. “Don’t you not have class? You can sleep until you wake up naturally.”

Gu Sheng was so embarrassed she could die and immediately scrambled

for a reason. "I want to make breakfast for you..."

He smiled, not exposing her excuse.

He needs to change?

I need to change, too, ah...

When this thought popped into her head, she immediately grabbed her clothes that were beside the pillow, opened the door, and was about to head into the washroom to change.

But she had not expected, when she pulled open the door...

Wwwwk was standing right there beside the kitchen, cupping a large bowl of noodles in one hand and holding a pair of chopsticks in the other as he ate. On the sofa was Jue Mei, biting down on a slice of bread while cutting open a bag of milk with scissors, and beside him sat Fei Shao, who was wearing a pair of headphones and fiddling with the DVD player... Everyone's movements were very quiet, not making any noise at all, as if they were in a silent film...

Speechless, she gaped at them.

They seemed to sense something and all turned to look at her.

"Did we wake you up?" Wwwwk continued eating his noodles as he very apologetically nodded at Gu Sheng. "So sorry we disturbed you guys."

Fei Shao also pulled off his headset, and with a couple dry laughs, he said to her, "Don't mind us, eh, Sheng Sheng. The two of us really did not know that you had stayed here last night. We had just pulled an all-nighter watching a late night movie and wanted to come here to catch up on some sleep. Who would have thought? ... You say, what a coincidence, eh? We happened to be able to catch 'The New Dream of the Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly Lovers[2]'..."

Fei Shao continued laughing dryly.

Jue Mei could not stand watching this any longer and sternly reprimanded the two flippant jokers, "From now on, if you want to come over, you need to call first. Toupai belongs to someone now. His bed is



only reserved for his wife to sleep on, understand?”

Gu Sheng completely froze...

From behind her, Mo Qingcheng’s hand had already come to rest on her shoulder. “Don’t pay any attention to them. Go back into the room and change first.”

As if she had been given a pardon, with her head bowed in embarrassment, she slipped past him, darted back into the room, and closed the door behind her.

T.T.....

She had not even done anything...

So why did she have this guilty feeling, like she had been found out?

\*

[1]多米. See Duomi.com. Also available as an app, which is what Mo Qingcheng would have on his phone.

[2] 新鸳鸯蝴蝶梦 “Xin Yuan Yang Hu Die Meng.” There are a few dramas/movies out there with the name “Dream of the Mandarin Ducks and Butterfly Lovers” (or “New Dream...”). The plot lines of these are not what is relevant here. Mandarin ducks and butterflies, in Chinese culture, are creatures that represent love, always appearing as a couple and “frolicking” together. Fei Shao is joking that he got the opportunity to catch Mo Qingcheng and Sheng Sheng “frolicking” together (in the bedroom).

\*

Additional Comments:

Ah, don’t throw eggs at me. I know it’s a fan made BL video between Wallace Chung (featuring one my favourite roles, Li Nanxing, he played, by the way) and Julian Cheung, but this is my favourite version of the song. It’s a duet between two male singers, but just imagine Toupai singing it by himself, k?

Anyways, here are the lyrics to 若相惜 Ruo Xiang Xi [If We Had

Cherished]. The video posted is a cover sung by 東籬 and Assen捷.

[0:24] 月瓣似乎雕謝

The petals of the moon seem to have wilted away

倒映在那湖邊

Their reflection seen inside the lake

點亮湖面一個圈

Illuminating a circle on the lake surface

[0:36] 一個人的感覺

The feeling of being alone

靜靜的看著天

Quietly looking up at the sky

不知道天有多遠

Not knowing how far away that sky is

[0:49] 像出列的孤雁

Like a lone, wild goose that has left its ranks

遊弋在白雲間

Coasting amid the white clouds

劃不完美的弧線

Drawing paths of imperfect arcs

[1:01] 屋檐上冒著煙

Smoke rises up above the roof

對煙囪說再見

Saying farewell to the chimney

這一去就是永遠

For this departure is forever

[1:13] 多少離恨昨夜夢回中

How many regrets of parting were found in the dreams of last night?

畫梁呢喃雙燕驚殘夢

The twittering of the swallows on colorful rafters disturb the remnants of those dreams [1:26] 月斜江上 棹動晨鐘 前夢迷離 漸遠波聲 笛聲悠悠 春去匆匆

The moon hangs at an angle above the river. Oars move. The morning bell.

The dream is a blur. The sound of waves gradually fades away into the distance.

The sound of the flute is unhurried. Spring leaves hurriedly.

[2:03] 像出列的孤雁

Like a lone, wild goose that has left its ranks

遊弋在白雲間

Coasting amid the white clouds

劃不完美的弧線

Drawing paths of imperfect arcs

[2:15] 屋檐上冒著煙

Smoke rises up above the roof

對煙囪說再見

Saying farewell to the chimney

這一去就是永遠

For this departure is forever

[2:27] 多少離恨昨夜夢回中

How many regrets of parting were found in the dreams of last night?

畫梁呢喃雙燕驚殘夢

The twittering of the swallows on colorful rafters disturb the remnants of those dreams [2:39] 月斜江上 棹動晨鐘 前夢迷離 漸遠波聲 笛聲悠悠 春

去匆匆

The moon hangs at an angle above the river. Oars move. The morning bell.

The dream is a blur. The sound of waves gradually fades away into the distance.

The sound of the flute is unhurried. Spring leaves hurriedly.

[2:52] 多少離恨昨夜夢回中

How many regrets of parting were found in the dreams of last night?

畫梁呢喃雙燕驚殘夢

The twittering of the swallows on colorful rafters disturb the remnants of those dreams [3:04] 月斜江上 棹動晨鐘 前夢迷離 漸遠波聲 笛聲悠悠 春去匆匆

The moon hangs at an angle above the river. Oars move. The morning bell.

The dream is a blur. The sound of waves gradually fades away into the distance.

The sound of the flute is unhurried. Spring leaves hurriedly.

# Chapter 44: “Splendid” Rice with Pickled Vegetables and Pork (3)

The day before Wanmei’s anniversary event, she finally handed over the song.

In that moment when she sent off the email, she finally breathed out in relief. Now, what followed would be a long and torturous process. Actually, she very much enjoyed collaborating with people who had similar ideas and interests as her, slowly working together to grind out a song, and then, to watch the song get released... Such a wonderful process.

Perhaps only someone who was doing it purely for interest could relish in this sort of thing.

She reckoned it would be at least several days before she would get an opinion or response, and so she packed up her things and went home. She had not anticipated that she would not even get a chance to sit down at home for very long before her mom sent her off to the grocery store to help out.

Gosh, the grocery store on the weekend was honestly very busy, especially since this one was directly across from a hospital.

She sat at the checkout counter, watching Cousin and Dong Yiru exchange flirting glances, and immediately, she felt as if she had missed out on something. She was about to investigate further when an alert sounded from her mobile phone, indicating that she had a private message in Weibo.

Ling Long Ti Tou? Such a fast response...

Sheng Sheng,

I listened through it once, and I think it has a good feel to it. Of course, I’ll have lots of opinions and suggestions on changes to be made.

Since I’m heading out of country tomorrow to study abroad, I will be

very busy for two months and it will be hard for me to connect with you often. To avoid holding up the progress, I was hoping to meet up with you tonight. It will take about half an hour. If we can talk face to face, it will be much more efficient.

Also, I will be paying you the advanced deposit today. You can just send me your account number tonight.

– Ling Long Ti Tou

Meet-up? Tonight?

For this type of commercial collaboration, if it was convenient, meeting in person would of course be better than communicating through email. Although she had understood early on that she would certainly at least have 3-D world telephone conversations with Ling Long Ti Tou or, if they were in the same city, even have a meet-up with her...

The problem was...

Tonight?

How does she know that I am in the same city as her? But, that was very possible. Ling Long Ti Tou and Toupai were friends, so she she should know some stuff about her?

Gu Sheng tried her best to think in a positive direction.

After all, Ling Long Ti Tou's reputation in the entertainment circle was very respected, and her character was widely known to be good...

She had not finished battling within herself yet when her private message indicator started flashing again:

I'm at Mo Qingcheng's hospital right now. You should have been there before?

.....

What was the chance? ...

Gu Sheng contemplated, then replied: I'm in the grocery store across from the hospital right now. If it's convenient for you, we could arrange to

meet now. You can tell me where you are and I can go over to find you. Or, we could meet up outside the hospital at the Yon Ho[1]?

Ling Long Ti Tou: You can come here first because I can't really guarantee if I can get out of here right at this moment. I can chat with you when I have a free moment...

Gu Sheng: Sure. I'll come find you, then. Tell me which floor you're on. I will be able to be there in about ten minutes or so.

Ling Long Ti Tou very quickly sent over the floor level she was on.

Gu Sheng immediately told Cousin, "I'm going out right now. I'll be back in half an hour." When she finished saying this, she slipped out from under the checkout counter and left.

Cousin bared his teeth threateningly. "Hurry! Your mom has things to do today and can't take over my shift. I'll be waiting here for you to come back before I can go have dinner."

She answered with an "mm" and ran off.

The hospital on the weekend was, as normal, so busy it was scary.

To be honest, she had actually never once come here for Toupai... She exited the elevator on the floor Ling Long Ti Tou had told her and to her surprise, discovered there were numerous pregnant women – young girls, older aunties, etc. – walking back and forth here. She had come to the obstetrics and gynecology department?

Ling Long Ti Tou was here for... a prenatal check-up?

She was embarrassed by this thought and did not continue thinking in that direction.

On the left was the gynecology department while the right was the obstetrics department. And so, she could only stand right there in the middle, holding her mobile phone, ready to send a message. However, before she finished typing, someone tapped her on the shoulder. She was taken aback briefly and then looked back.

A female doctor was smiling at her.

It was that “I know you” type of smile...

“Hi Sheng Sheng.” The female doctor very warmly hugged Gu Sheng’s shoulders. “I’m Ling Long Ti Tou.”

“Hello.” She was shocked once again, this time over the revelation that Ling Long Ti Tou was a doctor. And furthermore, how did she recognize her? Could it be that Toupai told her? ...

“Let’s not stand out here. Come with me,” Ling Long Ti Tou smilingly invited her.

She gave an “mm” and said, “I thought you were here as a patient. I didn’t think you’d be a doctor, too.”

No wonder Ling Long Ti Tou had retired so early. She had been popular for so many years, yet this was the very first album she had ever put together. It turns out she also had such a busy career. “Our family has many doctors,” Ling Long Ti Tou laughed. “Your Toupai DaRen is only one of many.”

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She carefully dissected and analyzed this statement and then became even more astonished.

Could it be, the two of them were relatives?

That’s impossible, ah! How come Toupai’s friends did not know at all?

Ling Long Ti Tou motioned for her to follow her to the end of the corridor on the gynecology side and into her own examination room. By now, it was nearing the end of clinic hours, there were no patients here. Gu Sheng stepped inside, and then Ling Long Ti Tou continued explaining with a smile, “My cousin-brother[2] and I had a gentleman’s agreement long ago that in the 2-D world, we could not mention that we are sister and brother... Actually, what I’m nervous about is that his crazy fans will somehow try to find him through me. Scary, isn’t it?”

She laughed.



Gu Sheng also laughed.

Definitely needed to be kept a secret. Otherwise, if someone accidentally let the information slip and fans started coming to her door, it would be very frightening...

“But Jue Mei knows I’m his cousin-sister. Didn’t he ever tell you?”

“Nope.” She shook her head. Jue Mei, you big black belly[3]... Not only did you not tell me, you took the opportunity to lead me in the wrong direction... saying stuff like Ling Long Ti Tou had a crush on Toupai... So evil. They are relatives, eh. Relatives, AH...

Gu Sheng suddenly made a mental association with something. “So you asked me to do the song writing because Mo Qingcheng and I are...”

“How’s that possible? I would never fool around with my own album,” Ling Long Ti Tou immediately denied. “This album is very important to me and can be considered a way for me to commemorate my time in this entertainment circle.”

Gu Sheng gave an “mm.”

She understood this feeling.

Ling Long Ti Tou sat down, not continuing with the idle chitchat anymore, and cut straight to the point by starting to discuss the song with her. She was undeniably the strong, dominant female type and had complete control over the flow of the conversation. Gu Sheng also felt very happy. As they chatted more, she became more relaxed and less restrained. In regards to the song, she felt like they were two people who both keenly appreciated each other’s talents finally meeting one another.

“Did you know, I had actually already wanted to arrange to work with you several years ago after listening to a song you wrote,” Ling Long Ti Tou told her with smile, confirming that same sense of finding a bosom music friend. “However, that period was when I was busiest and I didn’t have the time. Luckily, several years later, I have come looking for you and you are still in this entertainment circle.”

“Hmm, back at that time ... Back at that time, I still hadn’t really

entered the circle yet,” Gu Sheng recalled. “I think, I was just helping out my classmate occasionally and didn’t even know there was a circle that existed specifically to create ancient-style music.”

“That particular instance was an especially neat coincidence. Someone had actually invited me to sing that song of yours.” Ling Long Ti Tou continued recounting, “I listened to the demo of you humming the main melody and thought it sounded very nice. I even thought, ‘This girl is so talented. She can compose and arrange, and even her humming sounds so beautiful.’ ”

“Back then, there was no Luo Tian Yi software[4].” Gu Sheng felt particularly embarrassed about this. “If there was, I would not have hummed it... I would have just input it into the software...”

Ling Long Ti Tou wanted to say something more, but at that moment, the telephone rang. She picked it up, said a couple of “mm-s” into the receiver, and then unexpectedly laughed. “Your girlfriend is here with me. Do you want to come down to see her?”

With that one sentence, she hung up.

Just like that, he was going to come?

She had originally intended to tell him that she was at the hospital after meeting up with Ling Long Ti Tou, and if he had time, they could see each other briefly... Now, it was even simpler. Ling Long Ti Tou had just directly summoned him down...

When Mo Qingcheng stood at the doorway, Gu Sheng was discussing with Ling Long Ti Tou the next step in the plan and arranging when next time to send the song to her after the modifications were made. A light cough was heard from the doorway. Gu Sheng immediately looked back in that direction and then had her breath taken away.

He had already changed back into his street clothes – a white button-up shirt, something he seldom wore, with a pair of light blue jeans. He looked completely like a tall, clean, and handsome student. Clearing his throat again, he stepped into the room, wanting to laugh but also feeling somewhat resigned, and said to Ling Long Ti Tou, “So, you still ended up

meeting up with Sheng Sheng before you left the country.”

“Of course.” Ling Long Ti Tou looked him over with a quick glance. “You hid her too well, so I had no choice but to make a move myself.”

Mo Qingcheng walked over and patted Sheng Sheng’s head as he gave a chuckle.

The connotation behind that action was very obvious: My wife is so easily duped. If I had known that in the beginning, I wouldn’t have taken those roundabout tactics with her.

Ling Long Ti Tou cast a glance at her watch and felt that she should go back to her work. After all, she was going to be flying out tomorrow, and there were still some matters that she needed to handover to other people. She gestured for the other two to follow her out. There happened to be a nurse who came over to talk to her, so Gu Sheng and Mo Qingcheng stood off to the side and waited...

And waited...

And waited...

Mo Qingcheng answered a phone call.

One was on the phone, the other was talking to a nurse. Gu Sheng, the only person who was not a staff member there, could only stand in the middle of the other three people and let her eyes wander to the other side of the corridor.

That pregnant woman’s profile looked so familiar...

That person beside her looked even more familiar...

How could it not be familiar? Twenty plus years ago, that person delivered her right here in this very place, you know?...

Gu Sheng’s mother also looked disbelievingly at her. She glanced around at her surroundings... It was right. This was the OB/GYN department. What’s my unmarried daughter doing here? Together with a young man? And with a white-coated female doctor?!

Mom’s eyes speedily turned to Mo Qingcheng, who was standing beside

her daughter.

And with perfect timing, he had just finished his phone call. Using the back of his hand, he gently bumped her face. “What’s wrong? Who do you see?”

Gu Sheng could clearly see her mom’s eyes widen. In a tiny voice, she moaned, “My mom...”

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Mom, you must keep your thoughts pure...

I only came to OB/GYN to discuss changes to a song arrangement with my boyfriend’s cousin-sister, AAAAH...

\*

[1] 永和豆浆 “Yong He Dou Jiang or “Yong He Soybean Milk.” It goes by the English name Yon Ho. A café style restaurant specializing in breakfast foods and soybean milk.

[2] 堂弟 “tang di.” This relationship implicitly means that Ling Long Ti Tou and Mo Qingcheng’s fathers are brothers, so they are cousins who share the same surname. In Chinese culture, these types of cousins are closer in blood than others, and they are called堂 “tang” siblings. They would address each other as “brother” and “sister.” Ling Long Ti Tou called Mo Qingcheng her “tang di”, which means he is her younger “tang” brother. For this relationship, I’ll use “cousin-brother” and “cousin-sister” to describe it.

[3] 腹黑 Literally means “black belly.” Many of you who read lots of c-novels will be familiar with this term. It is used to describe someone who puts up a good, kind front but inside is scheming.

[4] 洛天依. “Luo Tian Yi”. Sheng Sheng is referring to the VOCALOID 3 software, where you input the melody of the song and the lyrics and then choose which character/voice, also called a VOCALOID, will sing the song. Luo Tian Yi is the name of a Chinese VOCALOID.

# Chapter 45: “Splendid” Rice with Pickled Vegetables and Pork (4)

She could see her mother’s expression start to change to one of anger, and she honestly felt she was going to faint. Beside her, Mo Qingcheng was extremely calm and gently nudged her in the back, signaling that she should bring him to formally pay respect to auntie.

I... am not completely mentally prepared for this yet, ah...

She was weeping inside of herself as she walked up and, in a quiet voice, said, “Mom... um... this is my boyfriend...”

She did not dare look at mother’s face, absolutely did not dare, AAAAH, k? ...

“Auntie, how do you do?” His voice had instantly changed, almost like he was an entirely different person. The doting and teasing from a moment ago were completely gone, and replacing it was a simple sophistication and composure that straightaway calmed people’s hearts. “My name is Mo Qingcheng.”

“Mm... hello.” It was absolutely a – 30oC type of icy voice.

“Please do not get the wrong idea. I’m a doctor here in this hospital,” Mo Qingcheng said with a smile, directly cutting through that layer of awkwardness and clarifying. “I just brought Sheng Sheng here to meet my cousin-sister. She is going abroad tomorrow for further studies.”

“Ah... a doctor.” Uh, the temperature had risen to +30oC... “Little Mo, you work in OB/GYN as well?”

How come he had become Little Mo? T.T ...

Gu Sheng finally dared to look straight at her mother and her little aunt[1], who had come for her prenatal check-up. Little Aunt’s eyes were very nosily fixed upon Mo Qingcheng...

“No, in cardiology.” Mo Qingcheng’s deep black eyes were shining. So indescribably gorgeous. “On the seventh floor.”

“Cardiology... Cardiology is good.” The temperature of her exalted mother’s voice skyrocketed, and her whole face beamed delightedly as she pointed at the pregnant woman beside her. “This is your little aunt. I came here with her for her prenatal check-up. You don’t need to be polite and formal, just address her directly as Little Aunt.”

“Yes, yes, don’t need to be polite,” Little Aunt smiled, an expression of complete approval on her face. “Just call me Little Aunt.”

How come he could address her straight as Little Aunt? T.T ...

Unrivalled allure, indeed... No problem just nonchalantly and completely winning over two old aunties, ah...

Right at that moment, Ling Long Ti Tou had also finished off her work at hand, and seeing this scene, she immediately understood what was going on. She quickly strode over. “You must be Sheng Sheng’s mother? How do you do, Auntie? I’m his cousin-sister and also one of the OB/GYN doctors here.” As she was introducing herself, she noticed Little Aunt with her pregnant belly. “I should call you big sister, right? Or...”

Right away, Little Aunt’s age was dropped down by an entire generation...

Little Aunt was beaming like a blossoming flower. This was an obvious compliment that she looked young. The family of this niece’s future husband really knew how to flatter... “Call me Auntie, just like Sheng Sheng, even though I am younger than my big sister by more than a dozen years.”

“Then I’ll call you Auntie.” Ling Long Ti Tou immediately took Little Aunt’s hand in her own. “I am so sorry, Auntie. I will be leaving the country for studies tomorrow, so I cannot personally take care of you. I will recommend you to a doctor who is especially experienced.”

“Oh, that would be too much trouble for you.”

“How could this be considered trouble? We’re family.”

.....

.....

How come they were family now? T.T ...

Toupai and Ling Long Ti Tou, this big sister-little brother pair, were like a duo singing in perfect harmony as they worked together seamlessly until, in the end, Mom was stretching out her hand and clasping Mo Qingcheng's, not wanting to let go. Gu Sheng very embarrassedly got to experience her first ever "meet the parents" event. She felt that all those scenes she had read before in those novels were simply pathetic, you know? Were there any where the meet the parents happened in the OB/GYN ward, and after only a few, brief words, it was like they had recovered a long lost son, huh? ...

In the end, Toupai escorted Gu Sheng, her mother, and Little Aunt to the main doors of the hospital and waved down a taxi while, at the same time, pulling out one hundred yuan from his wallet and slipping it into Gu Sheng's hand. "I need to head off right away to the secondary hospital campus. Take good care of your mom and your little aunt for me, and make sure they get home safely."

She answered with an "mm" and clutched the bill in her hand...

"Auntie," Mo Qingcheng's voice rang out over her head to address her mom directly, "This meeting was truly too rushed, but I am very serious about my relationship with Sheng Sheng. I am absolutely regarding this relationship as one with marriage as the ultimate purpose. So, next time, I will certainly come to formally pay a visit at your home."

.....

.....

With marriage as the ultimate purpose, wha-...? ... Their relationship had just started, ah.

Hadn't it?...

This feeling of being slowly, one move at a time, swallowed up really wasn't an illusion?...

Those eyes were turned up slightly at the outer corners, a smile in them.

“Good, good.” Her exalted mother’s voice had reached the high temperature of 100oC and showed no signs of coming down at all.

This future son-in-law’s words were so pleasant on the ears!

Gu Sheng simply could not keep up with the rhythm of any of this. However, when she wanted to find him to talk, he was still so busy in the secondary hospital campus he did not even have a spare moment to attend to anything else. She was like a dumpling swimming in boiling water, bobbing and rolling from top to bottom and bottom to top until finally, she just was floating on the surface of the bubbling water.

Floating and rocking, floating and rocking...

She carried on like this until the next night. It was only five minutes before Wanmei’s anniversary celebration was to begin, but he was still busy.

Your Toupai isn’t coming? Geng Xiaoxing private messaged her in YY.

Hmm... he should be coming, I think. Just don’t know when...

When he got busy, he was the type that forgot about anyone else...

For the anniversary celebration of such a large association, counting the number of well-known CVs alone, there were already twenty to thirty of them. Plus this particular event was a joint collaboration with Geng Xiaoxing’s website, so many special guests from outside the association had also been invited. Even if Qiang Qing Ci could not make it, all these people could certainly adequately handle the event. She quietly observed, and observed some more. It was past eleven o’clock, and he still had not arrived yet.

“It seems our Toupai DaRen really won’t be able to make it,” Jue Mei Sha Yi said, lightly clearing his throat.

“Tonight is his farewell performance, ah” Feng Ya Song sighed regretfully. “Farewell performance.”

Feng Ya Song deliberately paused for several seconds.



Tonight was Wanmei's anniversary celebration event. Tonight was also Qiang Qing Ci's official farewell performance.

It seemed, if the screen was not flooded by comments like rushing tidewaters, it would not be a worthy enough tribute to their Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen...

In just those dozen or so seconds, the public comment screen was inundated with several hundred comments: "Noooo, Toupai DaRen..." "You're really going to have your farewell performance?! You're really going to retire from the entertainment circle?!" "DaRen, don't retire, ah! Even if you don't release any more dramas, just knowing that you're around is good enough for us, AAAAH!!!" "This person's heart has shattered into smithereens. This person is completely dead..."

.....

.....

Jue Mei and Feng Ya Song definitely did that on purpose, deliberately bringing about these floodwaters of comments to create a perfect farewell for Qiang Qing Ci. She stared at the screen, from laughing at first as she read to not being able to even read the words that were flying past her eyes like garbled encoding as the screen scrolled and scrolled upwards.

She felt her nose tingle, and her eyes were also stinging.

So touching.

While she was immersed in her own emotions, she all of a sudden heard someone put on a song.

It was all too familiar ...

That day, after she and Toupai finished their cover of it, she had developed a habit of always listening to this song.

Oh god, they were actually using this song as the farewell performance?  
...

Her entire body felt as if it was burning up. The love she had for the 2-D world and this entertainment circle that had accumulated in her heart

year after year as well as the emotions of all these years of listening through her headset to those songs and dramas all seemed to rush forth.

“Your wedding gown like fire has scorched the horizon

Henceforth, the setting sun will sear my heart like vermilion...”

Just like that, his high notes charged into her ear and reminded her of their first meeting at the recording studio, how he had stood on the other side of the soundproof glass of the recording room, looked out at her, and told her that he was Qiang Qing Ci

Right at that moment, someone private messaged her.

She clicked it open. It was Qiang Qing Ci, who had just come online.

This next bit that I want to say is somewhat annoyingly sentimental and stirring. It'll be better if I use text to say it.

Not long after I first met you, I asked you a question. I asked you, “Do you love me?” Your answer was, “I love your voice.” This is a very remarkable answer. I think I can understand how you feel. There are countless numbers of nice voices in this world, but only one voice will cause you to feel that “This is the one I love” the instant you hear it.

A few years ago, I heard a demo from Ling Long Ti Tou. There was a voice softly humming a melody. No lyrics. Ling Long Ti Tou played it over three times, then told me, this girl was so talented; she could arrange and compose music and her voice was beautiful. I felt the same. Of course, there was also something that she had not experienced: the heart stirring and fluttering with aroused emotions.

At that time, that voice was not yet called “Sheng Sheng Man.” In fact, there was not even a name associated with it. It was simply, “sheng” [sound].

Later, I found her.

She stared at this passage of text.

She could not even feel if her heartbeat still existed...

She had always thought that no one would understand that her feelings

for him truly had been love at first listen.

She had never thought that the one who most understood her would be Qiang Qing Ci himself.

Very quickly, he sent her another row of text: I learned how to make a new dish. Splendid pickled vegetables and pork rice. Next time you come, I'll make it for you.

She could not help laughing. A food dish again...

From the very beginning, he had used recipes to lure her. But actually, no matter how enticing those delicious foods were, they could not compare to the draw of his voice.

Do you believe there is a voice in the world that, after you've listened to it, will cause your heart to be stirred up with emotions?

In that moment, you will be frozen in your spot, in a daze, unable to hear your own heartbeat.

here will only be your breathing, very light breathing, for fear that you will disturb that voice, and you will want to continue to listen to it – continue listening forever...

The song in her headphones was gradually nearing its end.

She distinctly heard his voice speaking the final monologue:

“Til the different directions of the world no longer exist, ‘til the seas dry, only then will I cease to love you.”

He had added this line in himself. Apart from the people who had been present at the studio that day, no one else had heard it before. Not only were the fans on the screen going crazy with excitement, even the special guests who had been invited to the event had joined in with the army that was deluging the screen with comments: “It is better not to encounter one whose beauty can topple a city[2], AAAAH!!!! DaRen, if you go, my entire world is going to become just like a silent film, AAAAH!!!!” “Begging DaRen to not retire!”

“Yellow IDs” were incessantly popping up on the public comment

screen.

Even Feng Ya Song could not refrain from adding in his comment: Toupai DaRen, it was because of you that I entered the entertainment circle in the beginning. Please look into these sincere eyes of mine... You, are my dream...

Gu Sheng burst out in a giggle.

Qiang Qing Ci's microphone indicator finally lit up, as if he had just come in. "My apologies, everyone. From last night up until now, I have been extremely busy." It was still the same light, refined voice.

If you did not listen carefully, you would not be able to sense that, though slight, his voice had a seldom-heard tremble in it.

In order to gain control of his emotions, he cleared his throat and paused for a brief moment. "In reality ... there is no such thing as so-called 'retirement.' In this entertainment circle, there will continuously be people leaving, some people because they are tired, some people because of rumors and gossip, some people because of their work in real life ..."

When he spoke, he was always steady and deliberate...

Gentle, yet at the same time, distant. He made people love him, yet also made them feel like they could not get close to him. Perhaps this was the reason why he had been able to reach his position today.

He always was aware of one principle: "Friendship between gentlemen should be bland as water[3]," and he was always able to carry through with this principle, regardless of how much praise he received or how much slander...

Qiang Qing Ci.

A very light and reserved color, but with a hint of warmth in it. Just like him.

\*

[1]小阿姨. Maternal aunt. Younger sister of her mother. The 小 "little" implies that she is quite a bit younger and/or possibly the youngest of the

siblings.

[2] Refer to footnote 1 in Chapter 36.

[3] 君子之交淡如水. An idiom from Zhuangzi. Friendship between gentlemen – people of high moral conduct – should be bland as water, i.e. pure and not muddied by things like fame, wealth, personal gain, etc.

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### Additional Comments:

Without adding in another footnote, just reminding everyone that “qiang qing ci” is actually a metallic turquoise-y colour, like the colour of light glinting off certain mineral rocks.

Okay, I’m a sap. The first time I read this, I liked it, but this time, while I was translating and editing this chapter, I started tearing up, everything from Mo Qingcheng’s confession of how he fell for Sheng Sheng’s voice to his farewell words. The farewell isn’t even over yet. I wonder if I’ll get misty when I edit next chapter, too. I think I’ve spent so long translating this now that I’m more invested in Sheng Sheng and Mo Qingcheng. So, what do you all think of his reveal that he had fallen for her voice several years ago? I keep wanting to know, did he search hard for her? How did he find her? Hoping that MBFB will write an epilogue from Toupai’s perspective, but that’s probably dreaming...

Anyways, the middle of this chapter was actually supposed to be the end of the entire novel, right after the monologue in the song. The last line was planned to be “Til the different directions of the world no longer exist, ‘til the seas dry, only then will I cease to love you.” When this “final chapter” was posted, fans went crazy, saying they hadn’t had enough of Sheng Sheng and Toupai yet. So, the author gave in to fan request and continued the story and even lengthened the chapter. From Weibo, “In my opinion, the story started with the anniversary celebration [planning] and ended here with the [actual] anniversary celebration, started in the 2-D world and also ended in the 2-D world. It’s a very good full circle, ah..... At this point, it is actually a complete story, and all the extras that follow now are a little surprise for all those who collect my novels...”

Actually, I do tend to agree with MBFB. Everything started in the 2-D world, from Toupai and Sheng Sheng first hearing and falling for each other's voices, to their friendship and Toupai's courting, to their dating. And now, Toupai has officially retired and is pulling out of the 2-D world. He can close that chapter in his life and we could be left to imagine their relationship in the 3-D world. However, like all the other fans who love this couple, I am glad that MBFB is giving us more glimpses of their 3-D world relationship...

## Chapter 46: “Splendid” Rice with Pickled Vegetables and Pork (5)

“These last few years, because of work, I have had to turn down all kinds of proposals. Some were from old friends, some from new people. I believe it is difficult for a person to be able to always treat everyone equally and fairly. The ways of the world are unavoidable and will get in the way. So,” Qiang Qing Ci chuckled, “tonight all I want to say is, hereafter, I hope my old friends will let me off the hook, new people will give other CVs a chance, and you can all gradually forget about me.”

His words had been spoken very discreetly and mindfully, but they were also very heartfelt.

But... how could they possibly forget him?

Even though any sort of entertainment circle will have its ups and downs during its establishment, those will not prevent it from becoming better and better. And those people who arose with the circle in the very beginning and became famous in it will also be written into the first volume of this entertainment circle’s history books.

Although Qiang Qing Ci had been very tactful, he was also very clearly stating that, because of his work, he would not be accepting any more invitations to work on online projects. In the future, if you wanted to hear his voice, it would have to be through the mainstream platforms.

And perhaps... the opportunities to hear him on those mainstream platforms would be less and less, too...

Gu Sheng was also feeling a deep sense of sadness, as if tonight, they were bidding farewell to that era that had once had Qiang Qing Ci.

A sudden, simple love confession that had come like a secret being uncovered followed by words that were bidding farewell to the entire online entertainment circle. Her heart was following Toupai, like it was suddenly being flung up and then unexpectedly being dropped back down – even more exciting than riding a roller coaster...

She thought he would do as he always did and turn off his microphone and then leave.

But unexpectedly, background music began playing. Unlike normally, on this night when he was giving his farewell, he presented this song to the listeners without any warning.

There were no opening pleasantries, no unnecessary remarks at all.

These last ten years, he had always been as such. No need for debate or hype, everything said with just the voice...

[[<https://youtu.be/7hrSB51N6A8>]]

When his voice made its appearance in their ears, it seemed so ethereal and elusive that it caused people's hearts to palpitate. This was completely different from the other songs he had sung before:

“Like morning dew on the orchid cactus [epiphyllum], so near, yet so far.

It is said, the Yellow River meanders, but in the end still flows eastward.  
An 8000 year old jade suddenly fades overnight.

I ask Heaven, what is the purpose of this life?

Where the wind blew last night, who can count the petals that fell?

Under the vastness of the heavens, I dance with my shadow in the wind.

Who can share in everything with me?

Beneath the age-old Big Dipper, in a palace of beauty but cold with solitude,

It is better to be a loving couple, wandering the world together for all our lives.”

This was “Cha Na Fang Hua Qu” [A Song of Fleeting Beauty; more accurately A Song of those Fleeting, Most Beautiful Years].

His voice was grand and majestic, rising above this heartrending song, as if he truly had seen “an 8000 year old jade suddenly fade overnight” and “danced in the wind with his shadow under the vastness of the



heavens”.....

A moment of fleeting beauty...

Such a suitable song for him.

This last decade of his most beautiful years were merely a moment, like the snapping of fingers.

.....

“So beautiful I’m crying! Bowing on my knees! Toupai DaRen... oh my, I’m Feng Ya Song’s diehard fangirl, ah!!!! How come one song has made me change camps T.T?..... Toupai, begging to marry you!!!!” “(o^~^o) DaRen, no problem if you retire from the CV circle! The ancient-style music circle welcomes you!!!!” “Awesome idea! Begging Toupai Sama to march over to the ancient-style music circle!”..... “☺.☺ Anyone notice the line, ‘Better to be a loving immortal couple, wandering the world together for all our lives’? This is the true song that Sama is using to give his love confession, right?.....”

As the song was nearing its close, Toupai, for the first time in history, used his administrator’s authority and prohibited comments and flowers on the public comment screen.

Quiet was restored to the comment box for a few seconds.

Very soon, a few words appeared. In a distinctive color text, he said: Thank you, everyone. Goodbye.

And then, he very quickly exited the room.

This was... the first time he had ever left a comment on the YY public comment screen, and it was to say goodbye.

The time he went offline was eleven o’clock at night. Later, that night and all the way through the entire day of the following day, everyone felt that it was very surreal. This was because simply too many artists, old and young, big names and unknowns, friends of his and random fans of his ... as if they had all collaborated together, were, one after another, drawing farewell pictures to him.

There were all sorts of styles, from chibi drawings to aesthetic style pictures, Japanese manga style to ancient-style brush ink paintings.

Without exception, each one was clearly marked with the three words, “Qiang Qing Ci.”

And also without exception, when each picture was released, the artist would describe how he or she had felt in that first moment of hearing Qiang Qing Ci’s voice.

Gu Sheng watched as, in Weibo and Tieba, the art and drawings continued to pour in. She sincerely felt that he was truly a perfect legend. After he faded out of the spotlight, perhaps his fans would also gradually leave the entertainment circle, or perhaps his voice gradually would not seem as beautiful as it had been at the start ...

But Qiang Qing Ci would surely be a name that would be difficult to surpass and one that would never be forgotten.

Since there was no library sorting work that needed to be done next week, she did not go back to campus.

Tuesday happened to be his day off, but he had some recording work that needed to be done to wrap-up his work for the video game. That meant he would be sacrificing the entire daytime of his hard-to-come-by day off and could only meet her when it was nearly dinnertime.

This was her second time at this recording studio, but the two girls working busily at reception were already treating her like she was a familiar presence there. When she was waiting in the main reception area with nothing to do, the girl who knew her and Toupai’s true identities even pulled out from the freezer an ice cream that was normally for employees only and insisted on giving it to her.

She bit down on her plastic spoon, wordlessly refreshing Weibo.

When the search term, “Qiang Qing Ci” was entered, countless visually appealing pictures and drawings appeared.

It’d be nice if she saved all these artworks and then printed them out in an album for him to keep as a memento, hmm?

This thought had just flashed into her mind when she saw the latest news released this morning on Toupai's fanclub's Weibo... They had already started on such a project. Sure enough, fans' strength was always the most formidable...

"What are you looking at?" a low voice asked as a pair of hands pressed against the couch back behind her.

"Huh?" She tilted her head up to look at him. "I'm looking at those things all the illustrators and artists drew for you... I had wanted to make an album for you as a memento, but your fans love you more than I do and have already started on it."

He smiled, his gaze shifting to the ice cream in her hand.

.....

.....

Don't do it. One of your true, official fans is blatantly staring in this direction and watching, ah T.T. Don't think that just because you've retired, you can do whatever you want, ah, my Toupai DaRen...

And not just your fan, those people hanging around the reception desk are obviously also watching you, ah...

But that feeling of having your food stared at by a gorgeous guy was too uncomfortable as well...

She hesitated for quite a while before finally steeling her mind. Completely ignoring the knowing looks coming from all around them, she scooped out a spoonful and brought it to his lips. The creamy brown ice cream was taken into his mouth, and he even seemed very satisfied as he savoured the taste for a moment. His words were somewhat unclear as he told her, "Rum can be considered a hard liquor. When they make this particular flavour of ice cream, they will more or less mix some alcohol into it. Its flavor is really quite good."

If this naturally alluring voice was recorded, it could definitely be used in an advertisement to endorse this ice cream...

She actually did seem to recall that his favourite flavour of ice cream was, indeed, rum and his least favourite was chocolate.

He seemed to have mentioned this in an online radio interview a few years ago.

Now that they mentioned it, what a coincidence it was that the flavour they happened to be eating today was rum...

He leaned over and continued casually chatting with her. "There is one thing that's a little inconvenient when you eat this. There really is alcohol in it, and after eating it, a police breathalyzer test can detect the alcohol content in your breath."

"You've come across such a situation?" So remarkable!

"No. One of the new graduate students at my workplace saw me eating this particular flavour of ice cream, so he told me that he did an interesting experiment that tested for what types of things could cause you to be mistaken for 'driving under the influence.'"

"What sorts of things?" She was honestly curious...

"Mouthwash, Huoxiang Zhengqi Shui[1]. And also this: rum-flavoured ice cream." He reached back slightly in his memory. "But, the effect lasts only for a few minutes and then the alcohol content in your mouth will decrease, so really, it was just strictly an experiment. No one would actually have such bad luck where they would be eating ice cream and getting tested at the same time."

She dug out another spoonful for herself, put it in her mouth, and nodded.

Increasing her knowledge.

"Teacher Mo, do you like it?... I mean, this ice cream?" The girl who had had her ears pricked up the whole time to listen in had taken advantage of the opportunity of pouring herself some water to saunter up next to the two of them. Her stance was completely one where her hands were covering her heart. "There are lots more in the freezer. I specifically bought this flavour. You can eat as much as you like."

cold sweat

So obviously an abuse of power, making the entire recording studio eat rum-flavoured ice cream along with him...

"Thank you. It tastes very good." This man, who caused jealous, envy, and hate in people, however, only answered her in an exceptionally polite manner.

Gu Sheng gnawed on her spoon and gave him a very, very, very meaningful look.

Toupai DaRen.

I swear, even if you've retired from the entertainment circle, your fans' eyes and heart only have room for you. Even if they only stare at the three words, "Qiang Qing Ci," they will be perfectly content and think of nothing else...

"I thought of something." He suddenly lowered his head to look at her.

"Mm-hmm?"

"What are you doing for the May Day holiday[2]?"

"May Day? Haven't thought about it yet." Honestly, this second half of her fourth year in university was no different than if she had been given a half a year holiday. Only people who actually had to work would think about that holiday... She really had not considered it at all T.T...

"These last few years, I haven't taken any of my vacation time. I finally was mercifully granted some vacation time-off, but the duration is very short so I can't go too far." Mo Qingcheng put on a look of musing. "We can choose any island in Southeast Asia, how about that?"

Travel? With her boyfriend?

She gently reminded him, "My parents are pretty conservative..."

He pondered briefly.

Although she really wanted to go, the instant she thought about her dad and mom's teachings, she decided to call off the idea.

“I’ve thought about that, too.” He very considerately dismantled her doubts and crushed them to pieces while offering up a plan. “I’ll first arrange to have my parents meet your father and mother. Once we make our relationship official, things will be a lot easier.”

( ◡ ◡ ◡ )

.....

She gazed up into his eyes, unable to find any valid and feasible excuse to refuse him, particularly since his fan was there staring unblinkingly at them with a mushy expression like pink hearts were going to explode off the charts. It was obvious she had overheard the entire conversation.

How was she supposed to refuse him in front of his diehard fangirl T.T? Tooooo hard...

But, they had only been together for two months. Were they really going to have both sides’ parents meet each other so soon, and then just like that, nail down the question of whom they will belong to for the latter half of their lives? ...

\*

[1]藿香正气水. Liquid medicine used to treat various ailments, which I’ll be honest, I could not completely comprehend with the Chinese medicinal terms, but included dealing with symptoms such as headaches, chest tightness, abdominal swelling and pain, etc.

[2]五一假期. Literally, the “five one” holiday, or the holiday on the first day of the fifth month. More officially known as Labour Day holiday. May 1 is International Labour Day, which is a nationally recognized holiday, and then in China, an additional couple more days off are given as a national holiday.

\*

Additional Comments:

The lyrics to the song 刹那芳华曲 ‘Cha Na Fang Hua Qu’ [A Song of Fleeting Beauty/A Song of those Fleeting, Most Beautiful Years] were

actually presented in their entirety in this chapter already. I will just include the Chinese lyrics with timing points in case anyone wants them. There are tons of good female recordings of this song, but the one I linked is the only male cover that I like. (Sorry that the Chinese opera video might be visually jarring to the story, but it's the only video of this version of the song on YT.)

[0:30] 朝露昙花, 咫尺天涯,

Like morning dew on the orchid cactus [epiphyllum], so near, yet so far.

[0:38] 人道是黄河十曲, 毕竟东流去

It is said, the Yellow River meanders, but in the end still flows eastward.

[0:52] 八千年玉老, 一夜枯荣,

An 8000 year old jade suddenly fades overnight.

[1:02] 问苍天此生何必?

I ask Heaven, what is the purpose of this life?

[1:16] 昨夜风吹处, 落英听谁细数。

Where the wind blew last night, who can count the petals that fell?

[1:26] 九万里苍穹, 御风弄影,

Under the vastness of the heavens, I dance with my shadow in the wind.

[1:31] 谁人与共?

Who can share in everything with me?

[1:35] 千秋北斗, 瑶宫寒苦,

Beneath the age-old Big Dipper, in a palace of beauty but cold with solitude.

[1:44] 不若神仙眷侣, 百年江湖。

It is better to be a loving couple, wandering the world together for all our lives.

[1:54] 不若神仙眷侣, 百年江湖。

It is better to be a loving couple, wandering the world together for all our lives.

[2:08] 朝露昙花, 咫尺天涯,

Like morning dew on the orchid cactus [epiphyllum], so near, yet so far.

[2:16] 人道是黄河十曲, 毕竟东流去

It is said, the Yellow River meanders, but in the end still flows eastward.

[2:25] 八千年玉老, 一夜枯荣,

An 8000 year old jade suddenly fades overnight.

[2:34] 问苍天此生何必?

I ask Heaven, what is the purpose of this life?

[2:43] 昨夜风吹处, 落英听谁细数。

Where the wind blew last night, who can count the petals that fell?

[2:52] 九万里苍穹, 御风弄影,

Under the vastness of the heavens, I dance with my shadow in the wind.

[2:57] 谁人与共?

Who can share in everything with me?

[3:01] 千秋北斗, 瑶宫寒苦,

Beneath the age-old Big Dipper, in a palace of beauty but cold with solitude.

[3:10] 不若神仙眷侣, 百年江湖。

It is better to be a loving couple, wandering the world together for all our lives.

[3:18] 昨夜风吹处, 落英听谁细数。

Where the wind blew last night, who can count the petals that fell?

[3:27] 九万里苍穹, 御风弄影,

Under the vastness of the heavens, I dance with my shadow in the wind.



[3:33] 谁人与共？

Who can share in everything with me?

[3:37] 千秋北斗，瑶宫寒苦，

Beneath the age-old Big Dipper, in a palace of beauty but cold with solitude.

[3:45] 不若神仙眷侣，百年江湖。

It is better to be a loving couple, wandering the world together for all our lives.

[3:54] 不若神仙眷侣，百年江湖。

It is better to be a loving couple, wandering the world together for all our lives.

## Chapter 47: “Splendid” Rice with Pickled Vegetables and Pork (6)

“Come a little closer...” Gu Sheng used her eyes to indicate to him to move closer to herself.

Mo Qingcheng lowered his head.

She was struck with a brilliant idea and suddenly asked, “That dish, splendid rice with pickled vegetables and pork that you mentioned last time, how do you make it?”

“Splendid rice with pickled vegetables and pork?” Mo Qingcheng seemed to see through her intention but he was in no hurry to call her out on it. “That dish is a little complicated. You take pork belly with the rind still on it and cook it until it’s medium well. Then you wipe away the moisture on the rind and while it’s still hot, brush some soy sauce onto it. Afterwards, you pour some oil into the pan to heat, then take the pork belly and place it rind down on the pan. Let it fry in the oil until it turns a deep red color before you remove it and let it rest and air. After, place it rind down again on a cutting board and cut it into slices that are about five millimetres thick.”

She absentmindedly gave an “mm.”

What should I do? What excuse can I use?...

What can I do so that I can still go travel and have fun without having to meet the parents?

Mo Qingcheng seemed to be amused and continued to observe her face, which looked as if her spirit was out roaming somewhere beyond the skies, while carrying on without really focusing on what he was saying. “Then you take some lotus seeds that have been presoaked already, roll them up into the pork slices, and stand up all the rolls neatly in a bowl. Chop some pickled vegetables up finely, add to them chicken bouillon, sugar, soy sauce, and some cooked glutinous rice, and then mix them all together while the rice is still hot.”

“And then?” Gu Sheng pretended to ask interestedly.

Keep talking a bit more...

I haven't come up with a plan yet, ah...

“And then? You take the pickled vegetables mixed with rice and spread it evenly over the rolled meat. Put everything into the steamer and steam for about thirty minutes, until the meat is extremely soft and tender, before taking it out. Then, you flip the whole bowl with the rice inside it upside down over a plate so that the meat rolled with lotus seeds inside is now on top.”

Gu Sheng was not paying attention in the least.

“The steps are complicated so it is easy to mess up.” Mo Qingcheng observed her for a little while before chuckling, “Have you thought of a plan yet?”

.....

Seeing that she had been found out, she finally gave in meekly and looked up pitifully at him. “Let me think a little bit more, okay?”

In that moment, he was suddenly reminded of how he had felt the very first time he heard her humming. Such a familiar feeling.

In fact, right at the beginning, when he entered the entertainment circle and heard for the first time his own voice that he had recorded into his computer, he did not think there was anything special about it and even thought it was a little weird. At the time, he had only felt that it did not sound like his voice, and as for whether it sounded nice or not, he had no real concept. How could anyone have any feelings for their own voice?

And then, he heard her voice.

A little languid-sounding, a little husky.

So wondrously exquisite it soon caused his heart to soften.

“Okay.” For the first time, Mo Qingcheng gave in, but what followed was an even more tenderly and intimately spoken murmur. “Hurry and decide so I can make arrangements.”

As a result...

Ten days later, their vacation line-up evolved into this: Jue Mei, Geng Xiaoxing, Feng Ya Song, Dou Dou Dou Bing, Fei Shao and his wife, Wwwwk and his girlfriend, Mo Bai, Mu Mu... and even a pair from completely outside the entertainment circle, Cousin and Dong Yiru. The last two's addition to the group was purely a condition that Gu Sheng had to agree to in order to set her parents' minds at ease and let her go.

Originally, she had simply thought, if she said this was a graduation trip with classmates, that would solve everything, right?

So, she had turned to Geng Xiaoxing for help.

Geng Xiaoxing was very much the trusty friend and agreed to it. Then, she and Jue Mei did some planning for a few days and decided that this vacation would also be their first "out of the 2-D world and into the 3-D world" meeting. So brave. First time meeting in person and they would be going on vacation together? In comparison, her and Toupai's recording studio meet-up was really too conservative ...

Jue Mei knew about it, so then everyone else knew about it.

Before she knew it, the line-up of people going had become several times larger than what she had originally planned T.T.....

In particular, the exhilaration Dong Yiru had displayed when she first met Toupai truly put Gu Sheng, who prided herself on being a Toupai fan, to shame.

The excitement was the type that was demonstrated by standing at the main entrance of the airport with hands covering her face and tears filling her eyes but not daring to take a step forward... Overcome with emotion for a long while, she finally wiped away at the tears that were streaming down her face and said in a trembling voice, "Toupai DaRen, I've fangirled you for a full nine years. I've finally, finally seen you. Really, really emotional. Sorry, so sorry. Just ignore me. I'm just a fan who's seen her idol and is too emotional..."

Even Mo Qingcheng did not know what to say.

She reckoned this was truly his first time seeing someone that was purely a fan and not a person who had some form of working relationship with him or an employee of some sort, like the type that worked at the recording studio.

Fortunately, Dong Yiru's heart had been completely vanquished by Cousin already, so she only got emotional but did not really think about doing anything else...

The entire tour group consisted of only twenty-odd people or so, and their group accounted for half of the numbers. When the guide discovered that they were a bunch of people who were all acquainted, he thought that this actually made things easier. At least, when it was time for an activity, he did not need to notify people one by one. Once he found and told one person, it was like finding everyone.

"You should all know, lately, this particular country has had a bad relationship with ours, so the best would be to always stay with me and not do any activities on your own. Also, absolutely do not quarrel or argue with any of the local people. You'd rather suffer some losses..." The guide put his sunglasses on top of his head and continued his blah, blah, blah-ing extremely enthusiastically. His face beaming with a smile of exultation, he described that country as if it was as dangerous as the heart of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict zone.

Dou Dou Dou Bing had already been apprehensive about going to that country, and now, the more she listened, the more her heart started beating nervously like a drum. Clutching onto Jue Mei, she asked, "Why do we have to go to such a dangerous place? It's a vacation, not a thrill-seeking adventure..."

Jue Mei Sha Yi, on the other hand, felt the guide was overexaggerating. Pointing at Toupai, he replied, "Mo Qingcheng said, because the relation between the countries is so bad, we have to go at least once, in case we don't get the opportunity again to go there in the future."

.....

.....

Okay, this explanation of Jue Mei's was even more frightening.

Geng Xiaoxing very docilely stood beside him, still absorbed in the nervousness of her first face-to-face meet-up and trying to show her best side. About to die from laughter as she watched, Gu Sheng made a face at her: Hey girl, serves you right! Karma!

The guide was continuing to scare them, probably because he was worried that this group had so many men in it that they would possibly cause trouble with the locals. Even after they had passed through customs, he still earnestly reminded them, "Remember, when the plane lands, don't call me 'Guide', call me 'Team Leader' please, everyone, so people will not think we are a tour group."

In the end, even Mu Mu could not help grumbling in a low voice, "Hey Guide, are you going to hand out guns to us for self-defense?"

"Guns? You can buy them any time when you're there." The guide pulled the sunglasses on the top of his head back down. "When we land, you'll understand. The people standing in front of the Starbucks all have submachine guns."

.....

All the girls silently moved closer to the man beside her.

Dou Dou Dou Bing had originally been standing by herself. Looking around, she suddenly locked her eyes on Mu Mu, and silently, she walked over beside him. Mu Mu glanced suspiciously at her. "The PRC police exist for the people. Remember when the time comes to protect me," Dou Bing explained very simply.

"....."

As a result, the guide's intimidation tactics brought about a remarkable effect.

Those men who had brought their girlfriend immediately appeared tall and strong for there was now a place for their abilities. =。=

Their flight was a late night one, so once they arrived the next day,

there would already be an afternoon activity arranged by the travel agency. Therefore, many people took advantage of this time to sleep. Gu Sheng was also sitting next to Toupai with her eyes closed. Then, she opened them again, then closed them, then opened them to look at him... He was still holding a book and reading. She could not help asking him softly, "Aren't you sleepy?"

"I'm okay," he smiled. "I'm used to going to sleep late or mixing up my days and nights."

She exhaled quietly. "I get my inspiration at night to do stuff, too, so I'm wide awake right now. But if I don't sleep, I'll be really tired when we arrive tomorrow morning..."

"If you're tired, you can sleep." Mo Qingcheng's voice got lower. "It's a holiday and time for rest anyway. If you're tired, sleep. When you wake up, we can go play for a bit. We don't need to follow the guide's plans."

She gave an "mm."

All of a sudden, from behind them, Feng Ya Song's voice was heard. "Something's not right, eh. You two were the ones who arranged this holiday. You're not really going to stay inside your room the whole time to sleep when you're tired and 'play' when you're awake... and ignore us, are you?"

.....

It was the same thing that they had just said, but how come when Feng Ya Song repeated it, it sounded so... discreetly suggestive?

Sure enough, any words embellished by the voice of a professional would immediately be changed...

"Do you want to play with us?" Toupai's voice shifted, and he tossed the question back to him.

"..... No, not at all..." Feng Ya Song continued wearing his sleep mask... and slept...

Such ordinary words, but how come when the two of them spoke them...

they became so suggestive?

Sure enough, any words embellished by the voice of professionals would immediately be changed...

Gu Sheng continued to close her eyes.

She could not sleep so she could only close her eyes to rest up.

Once in a while, she could feel him shift or turn a page of the book.

Not long after, he turned off the overhead light above her. She felt a weight on her. He had covered her with a blanket the flight attendant had brought over.

And so, she suffered like this all the way to the island hotel. Gu Sheng and Geng Xiaoxing were staying together, and Toupai and Jue Mei naturally were also sharing a room. With an expression on their faces that said, "You guys are obviously 'covering your ears while stealing a bell[1]' [a futile cover-up for an action that is plainly obvious]," everyone went into their own rooms, planning to make up some sleep with an afternoon nap and then head out together to the beach for a walk.

Gu Sheng and Geng Xiaoxing's room was next door to Toupai's. The hotel they were staying in was right on the white sand beach, and only that stretch of fine white sand and a row of bars separated the hotel's front entrance and the ocean.

Just seeing the ocean so close caused the tiredness from the late-night flight that had been several hours long and the exhaustion from the two-hour long brutal trip from the airport to the hotel to completely disappear.

Toupai had booked all ocean-view rooms.

Their rooms on the fourth and fifth floors all shared an open balcony, perfect for people travelling on vacation together.

Once they stepped into their room, Geng Xiaoxing drew the curtains shut and immediately began changing from her winter clothes into summer ones. "I brought two sets of bathing suits. One is a bikini while



the other one is more reserved... Which should I wear? ...”

Gu Sheng only changed into a dress. “..... Two sets?”

“Yeah. I didn’t know what everyone else was going to wear... This won’t do. I’ve been covered in sweat since we got off the plane. I’m going to go bathe first.” Geng Xiaoxing hugged her clothes and anxiously dashed into the washroom.

Gu Sheng had just pulled up the zipper on the side of her dress when there was a knock on the balcony door.

She pulled open the curtain. Toupai was standing there on the other side of the glass door wearing a black pair of beach shorts and a dark blue short-sleeved shirt. His outline nearly obscured the entire background scenery of turquoise ocean waters and blue sky. He was wearing a blue baseball cap, and in the faint shadow cast by the cap, his eyes seemed even more beautiful.

She was about to open her mouth to speak when she saw him bend over and, from underneath the glass door, stuff her a note.

Puzzled, she picked it up.

On the paper was a drawing of a girl wearing a big, straw sunhat. A simple, quick sketch but very cute.

On the bottom was a row of words: Very hot out. The less you wear, the better. But your straw sunhat is a must.

The less you wear, the better...

When she looked up again, Mo Qingcheng was already motioning for her to stay quiet and then his two fingers made a “let’s go” gesture.

Slip out quietly?

Gu Sheng was somewhat perplexed but still very cooperatively picked up her room card and huge straw hat and, amid the sound of water coming from Geng Xiaoxing’s shower, snuck quietly out of the room. Even when she had slipped into the elevator and then stepped out of the hotel, she still felt as if she was sneaking out to have a romantic rendezvous.

It happened to be raining heavily outside.

“We didn’t bring an umbrella. What should we do?” Gu Sheng gazed at the rain somewhat hesitantly.

“No worries. These types of islands can rain several times a day. The sun will soon be out.”

The two of them, each carrying their own sandals, walked barefoot past an outdoor bar... Sure enough, less than five minutes later, the rain turned into scorching sunshine so that even the sand dried out quickly and, beneath the blazing sun, became soft and scalding hot.

She treaded unevenly on the sand for a little while, happy from just doing this.

“Happy?”

She nodded. “Very, very.”

The burning hot sand warmed the soles of her feet. An extremely comfortable feeling.

Sunshine, beach, and Toupai beside her... She used her foot to step lightly on the top of his foot. He stopped. Holding down her straw hat with one hand, she tilted her face upwards, and in that moment where he lowered his head to look at her, she gave him a quick kiss on the corner of his lips.

He gazed down at her, a smile spreading across his face.

Hastily, she used her straw hat to block the view of her face and then pointed at the ocean in the distance. “The guide said we’ll be going out on the water to fish soon.”

Toupai replied with a quiet “mm.” It was very gentle and easily went into the depths of her heart...

Whew! “Eating tofu[2]” [hitting on someone] in broad daylight does indeed require an extremely strong heart.....

All around them, there were people coming and going. How come, just now, she hadn’t noticed there were so many people?! ...

\*

[1]掩耳盗铃. A Chinese idiom that means that you are not able to deceive anyone else and can only deceive yourself with your actions, like an ostrich burying its head in the sand. Everyone is implying that they “know” the room arrangements with Gu Sheng/Geng Xiaoxing and Toupai/Jue Mei are just a cover-up for the fact that the occupants of the two rooms are likely going to do a little switcheroo later.

[2]吃豆腐 ‘chi dou fu.’ Taking advantage or liberties with someone by touching, kissing, etc, usually without their explicit permission.

\*

### Additional Comments:

Why is this particular dish so “splendid”? 梅菜扣肉饭 ‘mei cai kou ruo fan’ rice with pickled vegetables and pork is actually a very common dish, something that can be made in any home kitchen. The pork is just sliced or chopped up into the rice. My dad tells me he ate it so much when he was a kid that he became sick of it and as a result, I only ate it a handful of times when I was growing up. This home kitchen rice dish is different from Toupai’s in that there are no little intricate rolls of meat with lotus seed in there. Those rolls are labour intensive. In fact, the little meat rolls are a specialty dish, called 莲子扣肉卷 rolled lotus seed in sliced pork, in itself, found usually only in large restaurants. (To be honest, I know it’s supposed to look cool, but every picture that I saw of the rolls reminded me of a brain or some brain coral that I saw when I was diving... not appetizing...) So, what Toupai is doing here is switching up a very common rice dish that many Chinese homes would make and combining it with a restaurant dish. Here’s a picture of what the common version of the dish would probably look like when served up at home. What a difference, eh?

# Chapter 48: Coconut Rice (1)

In the end, because the sun was too strong, the three to four hour-long planned activity of fishing out at sea was changed to a one-hour sailboat ride.

When the girls were standing in knee-deep water and staring out at the sailboat still more than a dozen metres away, they all hesitated.

The water depth here was already to the knees. If they continued walking forward, it would definitely reach the waist, so that meant their shorts or skirts would get all wet... Even though they all had swimsuits underneath, getting their clothes soaked completely through from waist down in the presence of so many men was still very inelegant.

Limited by height, ah... that's what this was...

Gu Sheng looked toward Toupai. She did not expect his answer to be so simple as he simply stretched out his hand to her and said, "I'll carry you onboard."

Ah? So many people around, though...

She wavered for a moment, but Mo Qingcheng had already lifted her into his arms and was leading the way to the sailboat, walking through the ocean water that was getting progressively deeper. At first, Gu Sheng felt a little embarrassed, but as she hugged his neck and looked back at the group of people behind her, she instantly burst out in laughter.

Fei Shao and Wwwwk had followed suit, picking up their own wife or girlfriend and following after them.

Geng Xiaoxing's whole face had turned bright red before she at last agreed to let Jue Mei carry her ... Only Dou Dou Dou Bing, after looking over the remaining three men and wanting to cry, finally steelled herself, tied her skirt up at her waist, and relied on herself ...

Toupai's manly carrying-the-girlfriend-to-cross-the-ocean display had put all the other men to shame and could definitely be recorded into Wanmei Voice Acting Group's history books... but only the original

members would be allowed to view it.

By the time they had finished their daytime fun, they did not actually get to go into the ocean to play until after dinner.

Their hotel had an area in the ocean that was exclusive for guest use, and there were not many people there. All of the group had arrived there before Toupai and Gu Sheng finally idly showed up.

Lanterns were swaying and all around, music could be heard. Since this particular country's relationship with China was not especially friendly of late, there were not many Chinese people, and all around, the sound of English, spoken with varying accents, could be heard.

Gu Sheng was the only one who was not wearing a swimsuit. She sat down on one of the beach chairs where all the girls had gathered and sipped a mango slush that had not yet been taken by anyone. Dou Dou Dou Bing had just come back from being in the ocean, and when she saw her, she asked curiously, "Sheng Sheng, is it an inconvenient time? You can't go in the water?"

She shook her head. "No... Mo Qingcheng said girls shouldn't go in the ocean at night. It's not good for the body."

"Toupai is sooooo thoughtful." Dong Yiru's eyes were about to fill with tears on behalf of Gu Sheng.

Dou Dou Dou Bing sneered, "Obviously it's only because he's trying as much as possible to prevent other people from looking at Sheng Sheng, you know?"

Over on the other side, the men were laughing, too. They could not tell what they were saying. They could only see that everyone was teasing Jue Mei until he could not take it anymore and pulled off his beach shorts, tossing them onto a chair. Whoa, nice body... All the girls' eyes lit up. Actually, the men there all had pretty good physiques. However... one had to admit that, amongst all the men, the ones with the best physiques were Jue Mei Sha Yi and Qiang Qing Ci.

After all, they had the tallest builds, right?

That was why, after Jue Mei, everyone was waiting to get a real look to see what Toupai with his clothes stripped off would look like... Come on, apart from Gu Sheng, everyone else only had this opportunity to have a peek when they were on a beach vacation, you know? T.T...

One, two, three, four...

At last, only Mo Qingcheng was left sitting alone on a beach chair, drinking water and looking as if he was not in any hurry to get in the water. Even Gu Sheng was amused by how everyone was gawking wide-eyed at Toupai and felt especially embarrassed. Luckily, these women around her were either Qiang Qing Ci's good friend of several years or already spoken for, and they were only curious about this man, who was always so striking he seemed to have a halo about him... well, curious about this man's, um... body...

Gu Sheng put on a pretense of being cool and continued drinking her slush one small sip at a time.

She had only ever seen what he looked like in his home loungewear, and at most, when he held her in his arms, she could feel that his physique was... very good.

Jue Mei suddenly gave a shout from the ocean, beckoning at Mo Qingcheng to come into the water.

Mo Qingcheng finally stood up and casually took off his top. What was up with those collarbones that were even more beautiful than a woman's? ... Not the least bit of extraneous meat on him and his abs were faintly visible. But yet the muscles did not affect the sense of pleasure for the eyes...

Ridiculously sexy. Ridiculously fit, you know?...

And so...

Everyone was even more curious, what would it be like if he continued to take more off?...

In this atmosphere set by the sound of ocean waves and the glow of the moon mixed with the lighting, everybody's curiosity had already soared to

120%...

Gu Sheng thought, this feeling where her boyfriend was being rabidly watched in eager anticipation was really too awkward T.T... She was contemplating, if Toupai continued to remove his clothes, whether she should find an excuse to stop him.

And then...

And then...

She exhaled in relief because he had headed straight to the ocean still in his beach shorts and entered the water. Many men also wore their shorts into the ocean... but...

Dou Bing gave a long sigh. "Is he really a doctor, Sheng Sheng?"

"Huh? Yes, he really is..."

"How can a doctor be so conservative? ..."

"....."

In the end, Mo Qingcheng went back ashore earlier than everyone else as well. Using one of the hotel's beach towels, he rubbed at his own hair and stood there, his body still dripping water, in front of Gu Sheng as he asked, "I'll go change and then have a nighttime snack with you?"

Gu Sheng gazed at him, shirtless and in wet shorts, honestly feeling he was even more attractive like this than if he had worn swim trunks... She hastily replied with an "mm." Getting him back to the room quickly to change was the most important thing, ah...

But when they were in his room and he had finished changing, he did not seem as if he was in a hurry to go out again. Turning off the room light, he pulled out two cans of cola from the refrigerator, grabbed two glasses, and went out with her to the balcony.

Because everybody was still out by the ocean, all the lights for the rooms on the fourth and fifth floor were off.

He poured some cola into the glasses and handed one to her.

Gu Sheng took it from him. Seeing him there with a shirtless upper body, she could honestly feel her face heat up. She took a sip of cola and leaned against the railing to look down at the brightly lit row of bars below.

On the beach, apart from people going for a stroll, there were only the performances that the local people had arranged.

A lot of very beautiful male crossdressers were performing with fireballs...

Behind her, Toupai was lying on the wicker lounge chair, resting. She was watching happily when she heard Toupai call her. She turned to look at him. The lights on the balcony had not been turned on, and the only light source was the light shining up from the bars below. As the glow shone upon his face, his eyes seemed to gleam like shimmering water.

“Come over and sit for a while.” In dim lighting, his voice was always particularly bewitching.

She answered with an “mm,” set her glass on the small table beside the wicker chair, and was about to sit down on the other lounge chair when his hand enclosed her wrist and pulled her toward himself.

Without any warning, she was so close to him.

He gave a low chuckle. “Lie on top of me.”

..... Gu Sheng’s breathing felt difficult and ragged. She gnawed at her lip and embarrassedly shook her head.

“Be good.” Mo Qingcheng’s voice became a little deeper and huskier as he gently coaxed, “Let me feel how heavy you are.”

Her face was hot and even her body was burning up. She was unaware of how he had led her with his arms or how she had been half picked-up until she was lying on top of him. Luckily... afterwards, nothing else happened to take things any further. He was lying there, leaning against the back of the lounge chair with Gu Sheng’s entire body weight on him, and she laid in his arms, body on top of body, legs on top of legs...



They were dressed so lightly it was basically skin-to-skin contact...

She could sense beads of sweat starting to form even on her nose, and she shifted slightly. "Don't you find me heavy? ..."

Beside her ear, his voice gave a light laugh. "I don't mind."

She could feel his hand on her waist... She was wearing shorts, so if he actually just moved his hand down slightly, that would be her thigh... Clearing her throat, she said softly, "That day, the final song that you sang was particularly nice."

He replied with an unpretentious "mm." "You liked it a lot? Actually, the way I sang it that day was too proper."

..... There was an improper way to sing it? T.T.....

His hand slipped down to the underside of her thigh, and he lifted her entire body slightly higher. Quietly, he started singing the song for her again, only this time, there was no grand and majestic aura and rather, it carried a subtle and refined feeling. His voice had the power to block out all other noise, and all the bustle and clamour on the beach immediately seemed to fade away.

She remembered that night, the feeling she had experienced the night of his farewell performance.

And then, she quietly lifted her head to gaze up at him.

Down below, the show had moved into its most exciting part. The glow from the lights that were continuously shifting between different shades of red seemed to sharpen the outline of his features and moreover, gave him a particularly elegant, yet at the same time, striking feeling.

The corner of his lips turned up in a smile.

She was uncertain whether she was the one who moved in closer to him or he naturally followed the momentum of his movements and bumped into her. The only thing Gu Sheng felt was that he seemed like he wanted to completely devour her as she melted away into his kiss. In the beginning, she had still been lying on top of him, but by the end, her

entire body was lifted up and placed onto the lounge chair beneath him. Her arms slid up around his neck, her breathing grew ragged from being kissed for so long, and her mind became slightly disoriented.

He suddenly pulled away.

Gu Sheng was startled as she, too, seemed to hear some noise. It sounded like someone had returned to his or her room.

Sure enough, the lights in the corner room of the fourth floor illuminated. Fei Shao and his wife had returned... She was about to sit up when suddenly he swept her up into his arms. "Shh..." He straightened and then carried her directly into his room.

Right as he slid the door shut and pulled the curtains closed, they heard Fei Shao's voice out on the balcony ask, "Did someone come back? I don't see lights in any of the rooms?"

In the darkness, he lowered Gu Sheng onto the bed. Her heart was beating so hard it was about to leap out of her chest.

## Chapter 49: Coconut Rice (2)

She pricked up her ears and listened carefully. Outside, Fei Shao seemed to think that the view on the balcony was nice and had decided to stay there to bask in the moonlight.

This situation was honestly so awkward...

They needed to wait a while before they could turn on the lights... Otherwise, it would truly be very obvious what was going on T.T...

But wait. Actually, all we did was just sit on the balcony for a while. How come, with him not saying anything and just bringing us to hide, it was like we really had done something bad?

“Do you still want to listen to me sing?” Mo Qingcheng, on the other hand, was not in a hurry to turn on any lights, and he lay there on his side beside her as he softly asked her this.

“Shh...” This time, she was the one who silenced him.

The slightest inattentiveness and then people will be able to hear us, you know?

Her attention was still focused on the balcony on the other side of those glass doors when Mo Qingcheng reached out and pulled her beneath himself. Supporting himself with his arms, he lowered his head and carried on with their unfinished business from a moment ago. Since this was a relatively wider single bed, it was still adequate if two people lay flat on it, but if they were to move about, as they were doing now, there really was not enough room. Actually, they were just kissing. It was just that, he always seemed to like to lift her up so that she was lying on top of him, but then after a little while, she would end up sliding off...

In the end, she was beginning to gasp lightly for air, and her brain was fuzzy, having been toiled by him until she was rather tired.

A night spent on an overnight flight had been followed by an entire day of activities. She had honestly not closed her eyes and gotten any sleep the whole time.

The room was dark, although there was blaring music playing outside as well as Fei Shao's occasional laughter, and other people seemed to have come back as well and were idly chatting... But anyway, during his time of inaction, she fell utterly and completely asleep.

The next morning, some time past six o'clock, she suddenly awoke.

The room felt slightly cool and refreshing. It was not the cool created by air conditioning but rather, it was the feeling of the sea breeze blowing into the room. She sat up and, through the gap between the continuously billowing and falling curtains, saw Toupai and Jue Mei sitting out on the balcony. They appeared to be eating breakfast while chatting.

Had she really slept here the whole night?

(◉o◉).....

Then what about Geng Xiaoxing?.....

Hurriedly, she crawled off the bed, still wearing last night's clothing, quietly peeked her head out through the half-open balcony doors, and looked all around. It really seemed like it was just the two of them there?

"You're awake?" Mo Qingcheng had easily heard her movements but did not turn around.

"Mm-hmm. Um... I'm going back to my room to wash up..." Gu Sheng saw her room's glass balcony door was also open, and hastily, she darted in, shut the door, and pulled the curtains shut with a "swish."

Geng Xiaoxing was lying on the bed and even hugging the covers tightly, off in a blissful sleep...

T.T.....

She was... really too easygoing and open, k?... She had really slept in the same room as Jue Mei after only meeting him the day before?...

In comparison, was she, herself, too...?

Geng Xiaoxing rolled over, forced her own eyes open, and peered at her. Immediately, she began muttering in complaint. "You put your man above your friend! You nearly killed me... I nearly died from exhaustion..."

“You didn’t sleep the entire night?” Gu Sheng was even more amazed.

Jue Mei DaRen’s speed was indeed too astounding...

“Yes, I did not sleep the entire night... because I was walking on the beach the whole night! The sun was nearly up when I finally came back...” Though Geng Xiaoxing was so tired she could kill someone, she still could not hold back her grumbles. “Last night, when I wanted to come back to sleep, your Toupai Daren called Jue Mei on his phone. He said his wife had fallen asleep and told Jue Mei to find himself somewhere else to sleep... Where did he expect him to go, huh? This is our first meeting. No matter what, I need to act a little more classy and reserved...”

So... you guys spent the entire night walking the beach?

Jue Mei DaRen, you are simply too gentlemanly (◡◡).....

Jue Mei Sha Yi was indeed not a pushover, and his counterstrike and vengeance mentality was most formidable... At noon, their group was sitting by the ocean, looking out at the wind and rain as they ate seafood hotpot, when Jue Mei, who had just finished eating a mango, set down his half a mango peel and yawned. “Hey, Dou Bing, it’s only you staying in your room, right?”

Dou Dou Dou Bing gave an “mm” in reply. “Why?”

“It’s not safe staying alone,” Jue Mei Sha Yi told her in a serious tone. “Let Geng Xiaoxing sleep with you, how about that? It’s better if two girls can watch out for each other.”

“Huh?” Dou Dou Dou Bing’s brain apparently had not caught on. “Then what’s Sheng Sheng going to do?”

Everyone was silent.

But everyone’s mind was also slowly starting to sketch out a very vivid, sensual picture...

Dou Dou Dou Bing was nibbling on the half a mango in her hand when she suddenly comprehended what he was saying. However, after a

moment, she felt something was not quite right. “Jue Mei, are you really close with Geng Xiaoxing? Didn’t you guys just meet? ...” So weird. How come he was specially arranging where someone would sleep? ...

Everyone once again fell silent.

%>\_<% Where did our normally extremely perceptive assistant group leader go? ...

That afternoon, that tour guide who had the habit of scaring people appeared once again and very energetically and enthusiastically began introducing them to this island’s most unique attraction: mountain road go-karting. Gu Sheng finally understood why the men had chosen this place. There was only one mountain on the entire island. On a narrow road that circled the mountain, they would drive from the base of the mountain to the top and then drive from the top back down to the base... This thrilling sort of landscape was not something every vacation island possessed...

The men were all rubbing their fists and wiping their palms eagerly while the women were stricken with fright.

This was going to be a race – completely on a bumpy mountain road, not at all avoiding the local vehicle and pedestrian traffic – of... go-karts.

Just looking up at the height of that mountain was enough to make a girl feel that it was dangerous.

The girls had all been warned ahead of time not to wear skirts or dresses and were all dressed in shorts so they did not have to worry about the seabreeze exposing anything that should not be exposed. But racing under the strong, scorching sun on mountainous roads and in dense woody areas... Fei Shao’s wife’s expression immediately became sullen and she insisted on staying behind.

Gu Sheng was not very nervous, presumably because she saw Mo Qingcheng’s manner was completely like that of a skilled race car driver, and the slight misgivings she may have had all dissipated. In the end, all the men aside from Fei Shao, who stayed behind under duress and the intimidation by his wife, climbed into the karts and lined them up in a

row. Because their driving speed would be extremely fast, everybody took a bandana and knotted it behind his or her head so that it covered half the face.

Mo Qingcheng had finished tying his already, and holding a pink bandana in his hands, he folded it into a triangle, helped her cover her face beneath her eyes with it, and very carefully tied a secure knot behind her head.

Feeling somewhat stuffy, Gu Sheng pulled the bandana down a little lower. She heard him chuckle as he stopped her action. "In just a moment, we will be driving very fast, and the wind and dust are going to be whipping up." Since he was speaking through a cloth, his voice was slightly muffled, and she felt there was something slightly different from normal.

When all the men had seated themselves in the driver's seat and the girls were sitting beside them, Gu Sheng finally understood where this different feeling was coming from. She clutched tightly onto her seatbelt and unconsciously glanced at Toupai. Because his face was covered and only his eyes were showing, he immediately was much more striking in appearance than Jue Mei and the others...

Gu Sheng very ungenerously thought, sure enough, having beautiful eyes was soooo important T.T...

As Mo Qingcheng held onto the steering wheel and discussed with Jue Mei what the stakes of the race were to be, his eyes would occasionally narrow or glance quickly somewhere, and he was completely immersed in the game... Finally, he tapped the steering wheel with his pointer finger and laughed aloud. "Alright, let's settle on that. Whoever is in the very last car to make it to the destination will have to sing 'Sheng Tang Ye Chang' [Night Singing in the Magnificent Tang Dynasty] in front of everyone at dinner tonight."

.....

.....

T.T..... Is that really okay? Don't you men think that's childish? In a

foreign country, in a place where people are having candlelight dinners, singing “Night Singing in the Magnificent Tang Dynasty”... Is that really okay? ...

That was a lively, slightly coquettish and dissolute... ancient-style song about the prosperous Tang era, ah ( ◡ ◡ ◡).....

“Mu Mu, you’re a cop. You must not lose, okay?” Dou Dou Dou Bing begged while tugging on Mu Mu’s arm.

She did not want to embarrass herself like that...

Mu Mu could not take it any longer and looked unsmilingly at her. “Cops aren’t omnipotent...”

The guide sat in his own go-kart and guffawed loudly at them. Slipping on his sunglasses, he advised, “I’ll say, you guys want to race? You young people all like to show-off. I come here once a month and do this every time. All of you, just be good, follow my kart, and don’t fall behind or get lost from the group...”

The guide did not get to finish what he was saying.

A loud burst of roaring engines was heard as accelerators were floored, and all the karts surged forward.

Indeed, very dangerously thrilling...

The mountain road was extremely narrow, and furthermore, there were constantly locals on their scooters passing by. Everyone wanted to overtake the kart in front, making use of every tiny opening and taking advantage of the opportunity when they were driving around bends or taking corners to pass people...

Gu Sheng held down the bandana covering her face. Amid the stimulation and feeling of danger, she suddenly felt as if her blood was boiling with exhilaration.

Right beside her was a wire fence approximately the height of a single person, and looking beyond that, there were only the turquoise waters, azure sky, and a very distinct shoreline.



The beating sun, the ocean wind, the dust and sand, and also the continuous acceleration and cornering. Her heart seemed like it was flying, and she would even excitedly take glances backwards. Jue Mei and Wwwwk were going all out, hugging Toupai's tail and waiting for the first opportunity to overtake him. As for the remaining go-karts, not even their shadows could be seen anymore.

"We've won," Mo Qingcheng suddenly stated.

The sound of his voice was instantly carried away by the wind.

They turned a corner, and their view instantly opened up.

Their kart had already reached the top of the mountain, and a panoramic view of the entire island was there before their eyes.

Bringing the kart to a smooth stop, he stepped out with Gu Sheng, casually pulling down the black bandana that had been covering his face. His hair was slightly damp with sweat, and in the sunshine, traces of perspiration could also be seen on the side of his face.

"Feeling hot?" he asked her. His voice was low and husky from the intense excitement of the race.

"I'm okay."

He suddenly stretched out his hand and ran his fingers through her hair, saying in a gentle voice, "You've perspired quite a bit."

\*

Additional Comments:

Alright you ladies with the very vivid imaginations, they just slept! Slept in the most innocent of ways. Tehehe. How are you guys feeling about the Jue Mei/GXX ship? For some reason, once they met in real life, I kind of felt weirded out. Maybe I am too conservative, and without much background on how they interacted online like we had with Sheng Sheng/Toupai, their pairing doesn't do much for me.

## Chapter 50: Coconut Rice (3)

One at a time, the go-karts that had been following behind drove up. All the men used their most professional voice actor's speech to plaintively pronounce that they should not have attempted to race Toupai, the go-karting hobbyist. Amidst Jue Mei's grumbles, Gu Sheng learned that, in his university days, Mo Qingcheng had actually kept a go-kart at a car storage yard on the outskirts of the city, and when he had spare time, he would go drive it for an hour.

It was only because work had become too busy and he rarely had the chance to go anymore that he had sold it.

No wonder... he had won so effortlessly.

"Toupai DaRen, I don't want to sing 'Night Singing in the Magnificent Tang Dynasty', ah..." Dou Bing, the last arriving, jumped out from Mu Mu's kart, nearly in tears. "I swear, I could have driven faster than him... Mu Mu, tell the truth. You wouldn't happen to be a traffic cop, would you? You didn't dare pass any cars..."

Compared to most girls, Dou Dou Dou Bing definitely could be considered tall, but standing there beside Mu Mu, she was still half a head shorter than him.

While she and Mu Mu were getting out of their kart, she was complaining incessantly. Mu Mu, on the other hand, had felt that safety was the first priority and he should not keep speeding up at all costs just to avoid singing a song... In addition, he even very honestly explained, "I haven't been driving for very long, so I'm not very good at it..."

"If I had known, I would have let Mo Bai sit in your car. You two buddies singing the song would be good enough."

Mu Mu continued his frank replies. "Mo Bai's still at the hotel sleeping. He's only going to the spa and didn't want to do the racing..."

Dou Dou Dou Bing did not even know what to do with him anymore, and jumping out of the kart first, she followed a set of stone stairs

towards a wooden house at the peak of the mountain.

When Mo Qingcheng went to buy water for her, their tour guide finally slowly showed up, hopped out of his go-kart, and very embarrassedly laughed “ha-ha” a couple of times. Then, he immediately pulled out a notebook and, with another local guide, started to figure out the total number of people that would be doing a seaside spa treatment shortly. When he reached Gu Sheng, the tour guide very considerately told her, “I know, the two of you are together.” The guide pointed toward the backside of Mo Qingcheng, who was still buying water.

“Mm-hmm...” What did that have to do with going to the spa? ...

The guide then went off to ask Geng Xiaoxing.

Geng Xiaoxing extremely stiffly and emphatically shook her head.

And then... the guide left.

As a result, only after everyone had been transported by vehicle to the other side of the island, where they saw a row of little wooden chalets and the guide had assigned them each to a room did Gu Sheng finally understand what this had to do with going to the spa... Besides the two married couples, everyone else had been assigned as either two men or two women to one chalet.

When she pushed open the door and entered the chalet, she saw that half of the room actually consisted of floor-to-ceiling windows that faced out to the ocean, and there was a small heated pool from which the sound of continuously flowing water could be heard. The other half of the room had two massage tables. Everything, from the floor to the pool to the massage tables, was covered with layers of flower petals... And the most awkward part was, the owner of this particular resort told them in very proficient Mandarin, “You can shower together first, then soak for awhile in the heated pool. You can even take a nap. Whenever you are ready and you want your massage, put on your shorts and ring the bell. Two girls will come in and provide you your massage service.”

Shower together?

Soak in the pool together?

“Oh, also, happy honeymoon.”

Happy... honeymoon?!

T.T.....

“You go shower first. I’m going to sit here and look at the ocean for a little bit.” His voice beside her smoothly abolished the awkwardness. Gu Sheng immediately hugged her clothing to herself, went into the bathroom, and washed off in the shower. When she came out, she had no choice but to wear the sarong provided by the resort and, using the method of tying the large length of cloth at the neck, she wore it like a half-length halter dress.

While she was blow-drying her hair with the hair dryer, Mo Qingcheng also finished his shower and came out wearing only his own athletic shorts.

In the mirror, she looked at the reflection of the heated pool, at him walking toward her with his upper body bare, at the wet footprints left behind by his bare feet stepping on the floor... She suddenly felt an unexplainable sense of anxiousness... Last night, even together in his room, sleeping on his bed, she had not felt nervous and completely at a loss like this.

“Hair’s all blown dry?” His hand was on her shoulder. “You don’t want to go in the pool?”

In this type of setting where, after a shower, you would head straight to do spa treatments, there was no such thing as bathing suits provided... That means being completely uncovered in front of each other, ah, Toupai DaRen! It’s better if we didn’t, ah. T.T.....

“No, thank you...” Her face started to turn red...

“That’s good. I’m worried about it not being very hygienic, too,” he said with a laugh.

His voice was still as before, unpretentiously entrancing... It was not

certain whether it was because they were in an exotic place, far from home, or because the room had numerous petals and incense to set the scene, or maybe... he had actually intentionally lowered his voice to speak.

She continued to grip the hair dryer and aimlessly blow her long locks.

Through those floor-to-ceiling windows, the entire beach and ocean outside could be seen.

Even though she knew that no one from the outside could see in to where they were, she still felt weird about it.

Mo Qingcheng's hand untied the slipknot at the nape of her neck.

She felt as if her entire being was going to burn up. She did not have a chance to turn off the blow dryer before the sarong slipped down her chest and her back was pressed against his slightly damp body. It turns out he had not wiped the water off his body before he stepped out from the shower.

His left hand cupped the bottom of her chin, tilting her head up to him as he kissed her.

And his right hand was already very naturally sliding downwards ...

.....

.....

When the two masseuses came in, Gu Sheng clearly looked like a cooked shrimp, her arms and body glowing bright red.

The massage therapists, on the other hand, were quite accustomed to such a scene. A honeymooning couple... That's what the boss had told them, anyway...

Because there were no limitations on the duration of the treatment, everyone left at different times. When Toupai and Sheng Sheng walked out, it happened that Mo Bai and Mu Mu as well as Geng Xiaoxing and Dou Dou Dou Bing were about done as well, and they all ended up waiting beside the ocean for their transportation to come pick them up.

As a result, the other four, with the jade waters, blue sky, and rolling waves as a backdrop, grinned and gave Mo Qingcheng and Gu Sheng a very knowing and suggestive look. Then, one after another, they put on an expression that said, “I know everything,” before turning back to admire the ocean, pick up seashells, and kick at the sand...

At night, the loser, Dou Dou Dou Bing was absolutely going insane with frustration because Mu Mu was truly the perfectly gorgeous cosplayer that made everyone drool... but he could not sing..... Honestly, he really could not sing.

To make Dou Bing, this former goddess singer once-called “Mo Mo’er”, be the backup vocals for Mu Mu... She honestly had thoughts of just wanting to die... But it so happened that our police officer DaRen was especially stringent about complying with the agreed terms of the race, so holding the lyrics he had scribbled down last minute, he followed along with the background music that was playing from his mobile phone, singing rigidly and precisely...

[[<https://youtu.be/o45-43mSwZA>]]

The most mysterious thing was, that night, Geng Xiaoxing was still assigned to stay in the same room as Gu Sheng.

Hence, while having a beer at one of the open-air bars, Mo Bai finally could not resist secretly asking Jue Mei whether Gu Sheng and Mo Qingcheng had gotten in a quarrel. Jue Mei stared incredulously at him. “How’s that possible?”

“Then how come they’re not staying together?”

Mo Bai was deep in pondering...

He turned his head to look at Gu Sheng, who was resting herself on Toupai’s shoulder as they whispered softly in each other’s ear. It did not seem like there was any problem...

“Sleepy?” Mo Qingcheng asked her in a low voice.

It was a very simple question, yet it felt especially tender and gentle. His hand moved to touch her arm, gently caressing her skin. She was curled

up tightly, her arms wrapped around her own knees as she sat beside him with her head resting against his shoulder.

After being tired out by him this afternoon and then very meticulously and responsibly massaged by that girl, her entire body felt indescribably sore, limp, and lethargic – a little tired, but also very comfortable.

Toupai...

Qiang Qing Ci...

Mo Qingcheng...

These names, all combined together, made up him.

Even though he was right there by her side, so close she could hear his breathing, she still had a very remarkable feeling. She wanted to always talk to him, even if it was only aimlessly, or she wanted to constantly be in contact with him, even if it was just holding his hand.

It seemed ... the instant she closed her eyes, she would miss seeing his face.

When she could not hear his voice, she would long for it...

She found this so bizarre and was somewhat nervous about it. When they returned home and back to their pattern of seeing each other only once or twice a week, would she truly go crazy from lovesickness? T.T ...

Strange thoughts started to fill and repeatedly overlap in her mind, but no matter what it was she thought about, it would gradually be replaced by the image from this afternoon, of how they had been intimate in that little chalet on the ocean. From being enticed by a voice to falling in love with him to there, being wholly laid bare and exposed to one another.

Until, at the very end, he had very level-headedly halted himself...

But prior to that... the two of them truly had not kept anything of themselves concealed from each other...

Gu Sheng remembered his voice by her ear that had practically been luring and tempting her, a voice that had been sometimes indistinct but tender and soft, sometimes husky and affectionate... She unconsciously

shifted her body, nuzzling her cheek against his shoulder as her heart started to beat irregularly again. When he finally rang the bell to call the massage therapists into the room, he had jokingly stated that he could not guarantee that he would be able to hold himself back every time, and it would be better if they did not stay in the same room together...

Could not hold himself back, wha- ...?

Was it really that hard? ...

\*

Additional Comments:

Did you really read what you think you read? Really?... Yup... Wah, so subtle...

For those who complained last chapter that your wild imaginations were wasted, does this make up for it? (I was secretly snickering when I read all those comments. :p) Don't think too hard about it or the image might give you another nosebleed. You just recovered not too long ago from the last one. :p

Ah, the image of Mu Mu singing that boppy, rap song with his deadpan face made me his fan. ROFL. As for the song 盛唐夜唱 "Sheng Tang Ye Chang" [Night Singing in the Prosperous Tang Dynasty], I actually started the lyric translations, but only a few lines into it and I had footnotes everywhere. The lyrics are actually widely admired in the ancient-style music circle for its grand and eloquent language that paints a picture of prosperity in the height of the Tang dynasty by describing scenes in the night life of that era. It quotes ancient literary works and pulls in historical references, events, and figures, hence all the footnotes that would be needed to describe what exactly EDIQ, the lyricist is trying to say. In summary, the lyrics are brilliant but much would be lost in translation, or you would want to ram your head against a brick wall because of all my footnotes. Therefore, I decided to abandon the idea of translating it. Here is a little excerpt of the first little bit in the rap part that I translated to give you an idea of the scene it is trying to describe. It is not nearly as eloquent as the original lyrics:



(spoken)

奉天承运，皇帝诏曰。

By the mandate of Heaven, the emperor proclaims his imperial order:

龙膏酒我醉一醉，把葡萄美酒夜光杯，颁赐群臣品其味，金鼎烹羊记得添肉桂。

“Long Gao” wine for me so I may be a little tipsy. Fine wine pressed of grapes[a] in luminous jade cups bestowed to all the court officials so that they may savour its taste. Remember to add cinnamon to the lamb cooking in the golden cauldron.

胡姬酒肆灯花泪，以黄金销尽一宿寐，雾雨轻挠美人背，赏丝竹罗衣舞纷飞。

In the wine shop of the beautiful non-Han woman, tears of wax flow down the lamp and gold is spent in exchange for a night of “sleep.” In the mist and rain, (someone) gently caresses the beauty’s back and is rewarded with the music of the sizu [a traditional Chinese instrument] and a dance where sheer garments swirl in the air.

[a] 龙膏酒 “Long Gao” wine was a wine from Persia. It and grape wine, from Gaochang were known to be fine wines in the Tang dynasty.

[b] 夜光杯 Luminous cup made of jade that was very expensive. When containing alcohol, it would glimmer in the moonlight. If every official in the imperial court was bestowed this to drink with his grape wine, can you imagine the prosperity of the dynasty at that time?

# Chapter 51: Coconut Rice (4)

Fortunately, next day's activities were very simple, just open water fishing and snorkeling.

That was, aside from the fact that the sun was a little too intense and shining so brightly that you could not even really open your eyes, and you felt a little like you were being tormented.

Their tour group consisted of two boats and their party alone occupied an entire boat. They each received some simple fishing line from the captain. At first, they had thought it would be just like the movies where they would be using a deep sea fishing rod and stylishly casting their lines out a dozen or so metres, but in fact, what they got was just a very, very long fishing line wound around a bottle  $\cap (\cup \nabla \cup) \cap$ .

Cousin had become well-acquainted with all of them by now and had begun mocking and jesting around with them already. He did not really comprehend how awesome all these big name experts, who had long since been given godly status in the 2-D world, truly were, treating them as ordinary friends and, later, even very enthusiastically discussing "Sword 3 Online" with them. In contrast, the whole trip, Dong Yiru was unable to relax in front of her biggest idol ever, Qiang Qing Ci, and her cosplayer idol, Mu Mu, and had an expression on her face that looked completely as if there was too much gossip here for her to digest...

Everybody was sitting on the wooden benches on either side of the boat. With lifejackets on and their feet immersed in the ocean water, they languidly jiggled their fishing lines.

Gu Sheng and Toupai were sitting at the stern of the boat. She gripped her bottle in her hands, and after a short while, she felt something tug on her line. "I think I might have gotten a bite on the line."

"Do you feel anything?" He glanced at the fishing line in her hand. Sure enough, it was taut.

"Mm-hmm..."

In a split second, her face reddened.

That afternoon, he had asked her this same question as well T.T. How come she suddenly thought about that?...

Mo Qingcheng did not notice anything and stretched out his hand to help her lure the fish. Over and over, he would tug, then release the line again. She gazed at the side profile of his face and those eyes that turned slightly upwards at the outer corners ... In just this short moment of inattention, the wind blew her straw sunhat off her head. Instinctively, she tried to grab at it, but missed. Wobbling unsteadily, she nearly fell into the ocean, but luckily, he grabbed onto her lifejacket with one hand. Only when her sunhat had landed in the ocean did she realize that her action just now had been very dangerous.

And she had caused that fish of hers to escape. Plus, the fishing line was now wrapped around her calf T.T ...

Gu Sheng pulled her feet up out of the water, stood up on where she had been sitting on the wooden bench, and began to unravel the fishing line. The thin line was wrapped several times around her leg and was even knotted in places, and, on top of that, the sunlight was so blinding. She was honestly having a very serious case of bad luck, ah...

“Don’t tug on it. I’ll untangle it for you.” As he said this, his hand was already reaching over, but he had not fiddled with the line for very long when he let out a chuckle. “How come I’m always untangling something for you? For example, the first time was your hair, and the second time was still your hair. This time is pretty good, actually. You’ve changed it to be fishing line.”

.....

Why was her face growing hot again? ...

Gu Sheng, what are you thinking? How come your mind is always able to conjure up images that are for mature audiences only and not suitable for children? T.T ...

“What are you thinking?” His voice was low and a hint of teasing could

even be heard at the end of his question.

“Nothing...” She awkwardly pulled back her leg, wanting to leave the touch of his fingers.

He had seen through her thoughts... So embarrassing...

“One of the boat’s crew fished your hat back up, Sheng Sheng.” Mo Bai, with her dripping sunhat in hand, suddenly poked his head out from the cabin of the boat, just in time to see Toupai holding her calf. He immediately laughed. “The two of you need to be careful at the back of the boat, eh. If your movements are too intense, you’ll fall into the sea...”

.....

After Mo Bai’s loud announcement, everyone else was not pleased.

We’d all been happily watching in secret, you know?

You’ve gone and scared them, and now, we most likely won’t get to see anything else...

Mu Mu, who was so seasick he almost wanted to throw himself into the ocean to kill himself, very weakly mumbled something: “Someone is so seasick he’s about to die. Someone else is at the back of the boat flirting and being lovey-dovey. We’re both in careers that involve saving people and doing good deeds. Why the disparity, then? Heaven is so unfair...”

Only the tour guide was standing at the bow, and pulling off his sunglasses, he waved his hand at them to chastise, “I say, you guys, why do you all like to gawp at that young husband and wife couple? What’s the big deal? We’ve been fishing for half an hour and no one has caught anything yet. That really sucks. In all the times that I’ve led tours, this definitely takes the record for worst performance.”

When the tour guide finished saying this, though, he was immediately on the receiving end of a dagger-like glare from Dong Yiru.

What’s the big deal?!

It’s a huge deal, you know?!!!! Don’t disturb this diehard fangirl from watching my biggest idol ever flirt and be lovey-dovey, k?!!!!

The tour guide's back broke out in a cold sweat, and he went back to urging everyone to fish.

Over on the other end, the fishing line had been untangled.

While the captain placed Gu Sheng's hat on the roof of the cabin to dry, Toupai suddenly made a shushing sound and stuffed his own plastic bottle, which he had been holding and was wound with fishing line, into Gu Sheng's hand. She had not even managed to react to this before she saw Toupai pulling up a brightly-coloured fish on the other end of the fishing line. In the sunlight, its tail flapped nonstop and the water on it glistened.

"Ah, caught one!" she cried out delightedly.

"Who? Who caught one?" The tour guide excitedly pulled out his camera, raced to the stern, and immediately said to Gu Sheng, "Hurry and make a pose. I want to take a picture of the beautiful girl who caught the first fish."

Gu Sheng was holding up the fish, and before she could even explain, she had been declared as the first person to make a catch.

Toupai merely smiled, not caring who was first.

The heavens may be great, the earth may be great, but making the wife happy is the greatest and most important thing.

Everyone had toiled away for half an hour, but in the end, it was the people at the back of the boat who made the first catch. As if the catch was the kickstart to a successful trip, within ten minutes, one after another, fish of all varieties were being pulled up nonstop by people and tossed into a bucket in the cabin. Before long, there were a dozen or more inside it. Mo Bai spent a long time very excitedly taking photographs of the bucket, and only when they were pulling anchor to leave did he reluctantly release all the fish back into the water.

Because she did not have her sunhat for cover, Gu Sheng's face noticeably had a slight sunburn.

When she returned to her hotel room, she stared mournfully into the

mirror at her red face. This time, she was not flushed because she was being seduced but because she honestly had a sunburn that was not going to just simply fade away.

She thought back and forth over it for a long time but in the end, decided to give up on going out to play again.

She needed to rest for a good half a day. Mm-hmm.

Geng Xiaoxing had gone off somewhere with Jue Mei Sha Yi to look for good food, so while waiting for Toupai to shower, Gu Sheng was in her own room with phone raised high in her hand, boredly trying to surf the net. However, she could not get any Internet reception, so in the end, she grabbed her room card, closed her door, and sat out on one of the couches in the main open area of the fourth floor, where she at last was able to get a signal.

There were also man and a woman on the couch with her, and similar to her, they were also holding their mobile phones and searching for a wi-fi signal.

Unexpectedly, when she opened up her Weibo, which she had not logged onto for a long time, the first post from a friend that showed up in her newsfeed was by Mo Bai: Open water fishing. A certain someone's wife got the first catch. It was a lucky kickstart, ah, a lucky kickstart for everyone. Just a short while and then there were more than a dozen fish. Haha.

The photograph accompanying the post was, of course, the picture of the fish he had taken earlier.

So vague, the way he wrote the post.

But because it was vague, it was too easy to guess who that person was, k?.....

And the worst part was ... the people who had secretly surrounded and watched them earlier had now all, without exception, "liked" the post. Seeing the "likes" from all these friends of Toupai, even a fool could figure out who that "certain someone" was ...

Qiang Qing Ci was still Qiang Qing Ci.

You may not be in jianghu[1] anymore, but jianghu still holds your legends.

No longer doing any online voice acting? That completely did not affect his fans' love for him... Truly, even the occasional, tiniest morsel of news was enough to satisfy everyone... As a result, besides Mo Bai's fans, Toupai's fans also immediately popped up on Weibo and very, very enthusiastically started to leave comments:

“Requesting a picture of certain someone's back!”

“Mo Bai Dada, please post more about certain someone, ah %>\_<%”

“Dada, please, requesting info on how certain someone is doing lately!!!!”

“Previous posters are all being so vague and reserved..... Our Toupai DaRen didn't have a flash marriage[2], right?! Dada, begging you to reply!!!!”

.....

Flash marriage...

Honeymoon...

She put her hand over her cheek. A little sore. She guessed her emotions might be a little stirred up ...

She was still mourning her sunburned face and also sighing over the reaction brought about by Mo Bai's Weibo when someone beside her leaned over her. Mo Qingcheng, who had just finished showering and whose hair was still dripping water, sat down close against her and asked, “Do you need to go take an afternoon nap?”

“Afternoon nap? Didn't you want to eat first?” She was gripping onto her mobile phone and could not seem to keep up with this logic.

The next second, Toupai had already lifted her whole body into his arms and, in front of the man and woman who were still holding their phones up trying to find a wi-fi signal, he blatantly carried her back to the room.

The man and woman both raised their eyebrows. Even though there was no lack of topless sunbathing, bikinis, and passionate scenes beneath both the sunlight and moonlight here and this really was nothing in comparison, still, they had to compliment the girl who had been carried away on her taste.

.....

The scent of body wash, which had wafted out from the the bathroom, could still be smelled in the room.

His body was emitting that light, milky scent, too. She mumbled one comment about being hungry and then, the entire sentence along with her tongue were “eaten” together into his mouth. The droplets of water falling from his hair landed on her and the bedsheets. A wet feeling, but not uncomfortable either. In fact, it gave a particular sense of intimacy.

The curtains were drawn closed, with only a very small slit that allowed a single blinding sliver of sunlight to land on the bed.

“What would you like to eat in a moment?” He continued his “eating” of her, and while doing so, also decided to show concern for the hungry person who was being eaten.

“Seafood? BBQ?”

“Good idea.” He nibbled on her collarbone and murmured, “The BBQ here is quite good.”

“Mm ...”

.....

.....

In a new straw sunhat, she sat there across from him in the open-air BBQ restaurant. With fork in hand, she stabbed and ravaged the various barbecued meats that were in front of her, just as he had “eaten” her not long ago, checking out the eats in every angle and direction, but not finishing it off. Every so often, she would tug at her skirt or her neckline, for fear something would show.



Such torture. So hot on the island and she needed to cover up so much...

So, his so-called “holding himself back” was just withholding that final step..... But everything else, he had definitely shown no mercy and had “eaten” it all...

How could there be so many different styles and moves? ...

Honestly, too awkward to talk about...

\*

[1]江湖. Literally “land of the rivers and lakes.” I always trip over my tongue/keyboard trying to explain this. Many might be familiar with the term if you watch wuxia dramas or read wuxia novels. It is often explained as the puglists’ world or martial arts world, but actually, jianghu is a broader concept than that. The martial arts world is more accurately called 武林 wulin and is what I would consider a subset of jianghu. Jianghu, in the ancient setting, has no distinct boundaries but represents all the people who do not live the common fixed routine type of life and who follow a more wandering lifestyle, such as the martial artists, street performers, wandering doctors. Moved into modern times, it can mean again, a world or circle outside the one in which people with normal, common lives live, such as the world of triads and mafias. This term has further been broadened nowadays to mean “worlds” that have their own little subset of rules, lifestyles, etc. So, the “jianghu” being referred to here is the “2-D world jianghu.” (Remember the song, Sword Cry in the Land of the Rivers and Lakes, earlier in the novel. I decided to use the literal translation in the title of the song but actually, it could also be called Sword Cries in Jianghu.)

[2] 闪婚. I’ve heard this so often I didn’t know until recently that this is more a Chinese term. A “flash marriage” is one in which the couple has only known each other for a short period of time before they quickly get married. The phenomenon is becoming more and more common in China as couples feel pressured to get married for financial reasons, such as rising housing costs, or sometimes, due to age (and pressure from parents.)

## Chapter 52: Coconut Rice (5)

On the day they left the island, they went to the airport at noon. While they were eating at the only Chinese restaurant there, the local guide who had been with them for four days unexpectedly pulled out a gift and presented it to Sheng Sheng, saying it was “a gift for the only newlywed couple in this tour group.”

Gu Sheng right then was eating water spinach stir-fried with minced garlic to make up for her nutritional imbalance caused by the lack of green vegetables these last couple of days. So, when the gift was handed to her, everyone at the table was filled with mirth.

They had all come along with Toupai and Little Golden Master on their honeymoon?

Ah, so that’s what it was.

And so, Gu Sheng spent the entire journey back to Shanghai embarrassed like this...

When they finally arrived in Shanghai, it was late in the night. Toupai drove her and Cousin to downstairs of Gu Sheng’s home. While Cousin got out of the car to get the luggage, she wanted to say goodbye but suddenly felt she really did not want to part from him. This was the first time in all her life she had ever been this close with a boy before. She seemed to have already become completely accustomed to being able to see his face and hear his voice right before she slept or immediately after she woke up.

But... it seemed, everyone who was blissfully in love was like this, right?

Don’t be so melodramatic, Sheng Sheng Man.

“I’m going now. Give me a call when you get home.” She finally steeled herself and said her goodbye.

“Alright.” Those gorgeous eyes looked right at her, and then he reached over and took her hand.

While she was still feeling downcast, he kissed her palm and said softly,

“I suddenly feel like I don’t want to let you leave.”

..... Oh no, it was over for her.

That mood from just a moment ago of steeling herself to say farewell to him was utterly gone now.

His voice seemed like it was seeping into the very depths of her heart. She honestly could not make herself say goodbye now.

T.T ... Don’t. Don’t use that voice to speak to me anymore...

“Would you like me to go up with you? To see your dad and mom?” he unexpectedly asked.

She was given a shock by this, and her first reaction was to shake her head furiously. Pulling her hand back, she said, “Bye,” and then, in passing, added a “Good night,” before fleeing from the car. Only after she had raced back home, taken a hot shower, jumped into bed, and covered her head with her blankets was she finally able to breathe out in relief... But her heart also felt hollow. Had she just rejected Toupai again? ...

T.T .....

But, hearing “meet the parents” just felt so very frightening. Even though he had unofficially met her mother already, what he was proposing was clearly something very official. And she did not seem to be mentally prepared for this yet.

She probably just had not had enough time yet... But... She stuffed her hand under her pillow and pulled the entire soft bundle into her arms. But, they were already so close and intimate, with nearly nothing held back from one another. What if, in the future, they... parted ways?

She hugged her pillow tightly and straightaway filtered out this notion from her mind.

T.T Too horrible. Just thinking about those words made her feel miserable...

Was this that trap they called “worrying about losing the good thing one has[1]”?

She fell asleep in this state of mind but did not sleep well because of the constant guilt that was weighing upon her for turning him down twice. She was not sure what time she slept to, probably when the sky was just starting to show the morning light, when she heard her mobile phone ringing from somewhere nearby. Feeling around for it, she found the lit-up phone, answered it, brought it to her ear, and said, "Hello."

"I couldn't really fall asleep so I went directly to the hospital instead." In the middle of the night, the voice was even more captivatingly gentle than a radio DJ. "Did you sleep well last night?" He really seemed to be somewhere outdoors, and the sound of vehicles coming and going could faintly be heard.

She answered with an "mm," and then after a few moments, said in a small voice, "I miss you."

"How much?" He gave a little laugh.

"Really ..." She decided to simply surrender and cut directly to the final answer. "... really miss you."

The person she missed so much that she could not even sleep was, of course, him.

"I'll go to the supermarket another day and see if they sell coconuts." He seemed to be in quite a good mood. "Haven't you been wanting to eat coconut rice all this time?"

Yup. Unfortunately, though, that island's mangoes were very good but the coconuts were not all that tasty, so she did not get her wish.

"Okay." Her voice was very languid. She was truly tired. "You don't need to sleep for a little bit? You're at the hospital so early?"

Mo Qingcheng told her in a very mild tone that he was not tired and said something along the lines that a previous patient of his had installed a pacemaker and then not long after, went vacationing in a rainforest ... The outcome was, the patient got an infection. Since he was back now, he went to the hospital to understand the situation. She listened to him for a little bit but was starting to feel drowsy, and after he coaxed her for

awhile longer, she dozed off again, phone still in hand.

When she woke up at noon, she recalled again what he had said. There did not seem to be anything unusual about it.

Phew. He finally was not stuck on the issue of meeting the parents...

During those few days she had been away, the supervising teacher of the group that was organizing graduation night had finally noticed that the person doing the guzheng performance was missing. As a result, he gave her an urgent summons back to school, and intense rehearsals began. Being hunted down by a teacher at last gave her the sense that she was indeed back from vacation, but even while she was in the auditorium rehearsing, her mind would wander and she would wonder what he was doing.

From this point on, Qiang Qing Ci to her was truly only Mo Qingcheng.

He was Dr. Mo.

So, Dr. Mo, what is it that you do everyday?

There were still actually many mysteries about the 3-D world him that she did not know. For example ... Actually, she only knew that his parents were both doctors, but at which hospital? She did not know. They wouldn't be at the hospital across from the grocery store, too, would they? That would mean, if his parents wanted to see her dad and mom, all they needed to do was cross the street O.O ...

So embarrassed.

He had stepped off the godly pedestal and opened up another door in front of her.

And what was the world like on the other side of that door? On the other side was the real him, how he had grown up since he was a child, his experiences... She wanted to understand all of it, to slowly, a little at a time, understand everything.

So amazing, wasn't it?

However, many of the couples that she knew about, whose relationship

had started in the 2-D world and some of whom even eventually married, seemed to be more concerned about each other's hobbies, strengths, personality, and reputation outside of the Internet, and these real life, everyday questions seemed less important. Perhaps it was because, actually... when the celebrity halo is taken away, most people are just very ordinary people.

But as for him...

Her fingers gently strummed the guzheng. No matter where he was, he would never be ordinary.

With rehearsal now over and free air-conditioning available here, such a quiet setting was perfect for idle gossip. Nearby, the other instrumentalists in the ensemble were also chatting, and the conversation somehow turned to the city's First People's Hospital and how, a few days ago, a patient who was carrying some sort of infectious virus had been taken in. That particular unit's medical staff all had no choice but to stay inside the hospital, basically being unofficially quarantined. Gu Sheng's heart gave a thud. Wasn't that Toupai's hospital?

She hurriedly asked further, but the girl only knew about the news because her family had been chatting casually about it. "Which unit? I don't know..."

Before the girl had finished speaking, Gu Sheng had already left her guzheng where it was and run out.

These last couple of days, he had seemed very busy, so busy that he had not really had much contact with her.

It was her fault. She had gotten used to the busyness of his work and the utter irregularity of his schedule, and she had also become accustomed to him sending her an SMS or WeChat message while she was fast asleep, followed occasionally by a phone call ... And this time, their interaction time when they were in contact was very short. She thought it was because, after several days of being away for vacation, he had lots of work and not enough time to deal with all of it, so naturally, they would have less contact.

It seemed he had said... said something about making coconut rice... No, wait, it was that he had a patient who had gone to the rainforest?

And then had come back with an infection?

It did seem that after that, their communication had been less?

It wouldn't really be his department, right? Couldn't be, right?

And yet, by coincidence, when she called his mobile phone, it was off.

She called him several times, and each time, it was always, "The number you are dialing is currently turned off." How could he shut off his phone in such a crucial time? She dialed Jue Mei's phone, but it, too, would not go through. She suddenly seemed to feel that, in the space of a single night, the two people in that apartment had just disappeared off this earth!

Forget it. She would just go directly to see him. More tangible and reassuring that way.

She hugged her bag to herself as she stood at the metro station, and even when the metro pulled in, she was still in a daze. Only after everyone around her had all entered the train car did she belatedly catch on to what was going on and also step inside. It was a half an hour metro ride to his home and forty-five minute ride to the hospital. Which one should she go to?

T.T ..... Why was everything such a mess?

She held tightly to her backpack, feeling a sense of turmoil she had never felt before.

It felt like gloom above her and darkness below. She had completely lost her logic and thinking abilities ...

\*

[1]患得患失 "huan de huan shi." An idiom describing someone who is trapped in his own worries about gains and losses, worried about not being able to get something, yet when he does get it, worried that he will lose it.

# Chapter 53: “Long Term Meal Voucher[1]” (Final Chapter)

Overconcern will cause you to lose your cool and have unclear thinking.

Station after station went by. The metro’s distinctive sound of friction against the tracks as well as its unique smell inside the train car all caused her to feel more and more unsure about which destination she should go to. Fortunately, when she was holding her phone in her hand, she remembered Geng Xiaoxing. With the approach of just finding one person at a time, she called Geng Xiaoxing.

Clearly, this postgraduate girl was even idler than she was. When she picked up the phone, she sounded as if she had not woken up yet.

And also, there was a sense that she was talking furtively...

“Are you able to get ahold of Jue Mei?” Gu Sheng was in no mood to ask her why she was acting like she was a thief.

“Him, um... Not necessarily. Something urgent?”

“Mm-hmm.” She cut to the chase. “His phone is shut off, and I’m not sure the reason. I want to find him and I can’t... I don’t know if I should go to the hospital or his home. That’s why I want to ask Jue Mei if he’s home or not.”

Jue Mei worked from home, so asking him would, of course, be most effective.

“Oh, you’re looking for Toupai. Maybe he’ll be turning on his phone soon...”

Geng Xiaoxing was dragging out her voice, and it was not clear what she was thinking...

“But I’m on the metro already.” Gu Sheng exhaled lightly. “The next stop will be his home.”

“Huh? So urgent? What’s wrong?” Geng Xiaoxing noticed that her mood seemed rather downcast.



“Nothing... Just that, I happened to hear that their hospital has a patient with some sort of infectious disease and many medical personnel have been temporarily quarantined. I was already a little worried, and now, I can’t even get ahold of him... But based on the time, he should be off now, so I decided to just go have a look.”

“Toupai is such a good person, how could he have such bad luck, right?” Geng Xiaoxing lowered her voice. “I guarantee you, Toupai is absolutely fine. He may have just forgotten to charge his phone...”

.....

Gu Sheng finally discovered that there was something a little abnormal about Geng Xiaoxing. Based on her familiarity with her as her roommate of four years, something was definitely amiss!

“How can you guarantee?” She started to turn the tables and question Geng Xiaoxing.

“In any case...”

“Have you seen him?”

“.....”

“Geng Xiaoxing?” Gu Sheng’s tone was steely.

“Fine, I give in to you... Come over. I’m at Jue Mei’s place. Toupai seems to be sleeping...”

Just as she thought ( ◡ ◡ ◡ ), ah!

The anxiety and fear she had felt in those twenty-plus minutes just a short while ago were now completely swept away. She also could not be bothered at the moment with finding out the gossip on how Geng Xiaoxing’s secret relationship with Jue Mei had reached the stage where they were having a date at his home. The metro happened to be pulling into the station right then, and with bag in hand, she ran out, swiped her metro card, exited the station, crossed the street, and entered his community compound.

It was a hard sprint the whole way. When she pulled out the key and

opened the front door of Toupai's home, there was sweat on her forehead.

The living room was quiet, like there was no one home. Her eyes glanced at Jue Mei's door, which was tightly shut. I won't bother with you right now, hmph hmph... She walked up to the door of Toupai's room but then heard the noise of water from the bathroom, so she turned and followed the direction of the sound.

Toupai was holding a white towel and using it to rub his hair and wipe his face.

He had a habit where, everyday when he awoke, he liked to wash his face and then also wash his hair while he was at it...

As a result, once again, it was a picture of him with a laidback, wet-haired look.

She finally saw him.

All of a sudden, her heart fluttered.

Since their goodbye that night after their vacation, it had already been three days where they had not seen each other...

Three days. So long.

"Jue Mei woke me up just now." He seemed a little tired as he hung the towel back up again. Stretching out his hand, he stroked her hair. "He said you were coming over. What's the matter? Why were you suddenly looking for me?" While he spoke, he walked out of the bathroom with her and back to his room.

Reaching back, he shut the door behind him.

Gu Sheng, though, had not yet thought about how she was going to explain why she had suddenly come over.

In retrospect, the reason was actually rather silly... Those incidences that only had one one-thousandth of a chance of occurring, she still had somehow associated with him. It really was so silly that she was embarrassed to mention it, ah T.T.....

She arbitrarily asked, "Your phone... is it out of battery?"

“Out of battery?” Mo Qingcheng picked up his mobile phone from the sofa and gave it a quick glance. “It does seem that it’s drained.”

He took out his charger, plugged it in, and turned on his phone.

Only now did he seem more awake as he sat on the bed and opened his arms to her.

Gu Sheng walked over to him. In a very natural motion, he wrapped his arms around her waist, buried his face into her chest, and inhaled lightly. “I really wish that the instant I wake up tomorrow, I will be able to see you.” Such a gentle, tender voice that did not conceal in the least that he missed her. She answered him with an “mm.” Her emotions had just been through a rollercoaster ride, and with him suddenly being so stirringly sentimental, she was utterly unable to withstand all of this

“I’m still a little sleepy...” He really did appear to be very tired. She reckoned that he had probably, again, gotten home and slept only two or three hours before he was woken up. When he was washing his face a moment ago, he had been slightly more alert, but as he held her like this and inhaled her scent, he started feeling drowsy again. “Sleep with me for a little while?”

“..... Alright.”

Very obediently, she took off her shoes and coat, and in her short-sleeved top and pants, she slipped under his blankets. She decided she would coax him to sleep first, and then when he awoke, she would tell him why she had unexpectedly rushed over ...

He very naturally pulled her entire body into his embrace. After a while, however, he was no longer tired. And since he was not tired, it was time to eat something.

Nowadays, Mo Qingcheng’s appetite tended to favour her and not those potato chips, yogurt drinks, dried scallops, beef, or fish of some sort. His actions instantly caused her body to grow hot from head to toe. Why did it feel like she had smeared herself with seasoning and offered herself right up for him to eat? ... In the end, she clutched at the blanket and could not help sticking her head out to protest.

Her whole body was drenched...

“Inside the fridge, there are some coconuts that I bought. In a little bit, I’ll go make some coconut rice for you to eat,” he said out of the blue.

She had not yet caught up with the beat of his thinking as she mumbled blankly, “You really managed to buy some... Is there enough for four people to eat?”

“It’s not four people, it’s just you and me.”

“Huh?”

Jue Mei and Xiaoxing were going out to eat?

“Sheng Sheng?” he addressed her.

She looked at him.

Just like that, Mo Qingcheng changed the topic and said in an unhurried tone, “Do you want to be able to see me all the time?”

“Mm-hmm... But you’re busy. There’s nothing we can do about it.”

Besides, she was still a student, even though... most of her time this semester was actually pretty free.

He continued to ask, “Do you want to be able to find me at any time?”

Of course she did...

“Do you want it so that, even if I am not home at night, you can still sleep on our bed and wait for me to come back in the morning?”

Did he mean... ?

His voice grew soft and tender, and it was already carrying a slightly husky, bewitching feel in it. “Do you want to be able, everyday ... to hear my voice? That no matter how late it is, I can still coax you to sleep?”

“Yes...” She finally surrendered.

Have you ever seen anyone propose that in bed? T.T .....

He gave a chuckle. “It’s good that you want to.”

And so, that could be considered to mean...?

That really was what it meant? ...

His voice lowered again, and he told her, “And so, from now on, it’s only you and me. I will only cook for my wife.”

This was clearly the most obvious form of voice seduction possible. It was like the story had returned to the very beginning. Her voice had enticed him, and he had also used his voice to make it so that she had eyes for no one else...

Even in those places where you are not present, there will still continuously be stories of you.

Even without the internet as a carrying medium, you are still a name that is unsurpassable, and that name will still be appended to the back credits of countless commercials, television dramas, video games, and movies..... To allow all those who love you to seek after your voice.

That voice, the one that instantly strikes into the heart of the listener, the one that is unforgettable.

And yet, the actual you is right here beside me.

So real.

Qiang Qing Ci.

\*

[1]长期饭票 Orig. ‘chang qi fan piao.’ Literally, this means “long term meal or food voucher” and is a figure of speech to describe a guarantee of being financially supported for the rest of a person’s life.

# Special: Weibo Random Scenes

So, these are just little scenes of Toupai, Sheng Sheng, and sometimes other characters that popped into Mo Bao Fei Bao's mind at one point in time. If it's not specified, you are not supposed to really try to figure where they fit in chronologically, whether Toupai and Sheng Sheng are married yet at that point, etc. The actual novel may not even honour these random scenes later, so don't think too much about them and just enjoy them.

If I know, I have written down the date of the Weibo post. Some of them, I haven't been able to find the original. Not sure if they were posted and then deleted later by Mo Bao Fei Bao, or I just was blind and missed them. I did not translate one because it was about a game in Weibo that I have absolutely no idea about. If I ever figure it out, I'll update this post with that one, too.

## Scene 1

(August 19, 2013) The honeymoon. Toupai discovered that the local currency in his wallet was all used up. Sheng Sheng saw a sign saying "currency exchange", so she pulled out 400 RMB and walked over towards it. Standing in front of the shop were five or six women, but none of them paid any attention to her, even to the point that, when she asked them a question, they would take a step away. Toupai wrapped an arm around her and pulled her back. In a seductively low and tender voice, he told her, "In this country, people who stand in line underneath this type of sign will only provide services to male tourists..."

## Scene 2

(August 19, 2013) The honeymoon. Sheng Sheng was sweating incessantly. "Why doesn't the hotel have any air conditioning?" Toupai was lying on his side beside her, one hand propping up his head. "This place is different from the one we were at a few days ago. They get little sun throughout the year and their summer is short, so the locals don't like to install air conditioning. They like to savour the summer heat."

Sheng Sheng quietly marked an “X” on the map. She definitely needed to tell Geng Xiaoxing, if Jue Mei was like Toupai and was very “physically fit”... this place was not suitable for a honeymoon...

### Scene 3

(August 19, 2013) The vacation where Toupai “settled” Sheng Sheng, on an island somewhere. Geng Xiaoxing was at a supermarket, and the cashier pointed to a poster behind her. She did not understand, so the person explained to her. She still did not understand. Jue Mei: “She’s telling you to buy a frequent shopper’s card. You get a discount all-year round.” Geng Xiaoxing complained, “I’m just here on vacation.....” She suddenly let out a squeal and exclaimed, “Have I gotten so tanned that I’m as dark as the locals here?!” Jue Mei cleared his throat. “It’s okay. If any violent incident happens, you’re safer than any of us.”

### Scene 4

(August 19, 2013) The vacation where Toupai “settled” Sheng Sheng, on an island somewhere. Mu Mu had just finished a shower and stepped out in only his underwear. The sliding door to the balcony was suddenly pulled open by Dou Dou Dou Bing. “..... AH!!!!” Mu Mu frowned. Dou Dou Dou Bing eyed him up and down several times. “I feel like I need to take responsibility for seeing you like this...” Mu Mu continued to frown and then yanked Mo Bai, who was still toweling himself dry and had not put on any clothing yet, from the washroom. “You’ve seen both of us now, so you don’t have to take any responsibility...” Dou Dou Dou Bing shrieked and fled from there...

### Scene 5

(August 21, 2013) There was a period when Gu Sheng had poor appetite. No matter what Qiang Qing Ci SAMA cooked, she would always have food left over. At last, SAMA finally gave a sigh and leaned over, his hands propping him up on the table, to tell her, “Most people who like to leave leftover food will go to hell after they die, and on top of that, they are forced to eat the food they had left over while they were alive.” Gu Sheng said in distress, “So that means I’ll have to eat decades of leftover

food?” She took her food and held it up to his lips. “My Toupai loves his wife dearly...”

### Scene 6

Gu Sheng continued to have poor appetite. One night, halfway into the night, she suddenly panicked. While Toupai was in the washroom, she sprang up, pulled out a box from the bedside table, emptied out its entire contents of several hundred little packages, and started carefully feeling each one. Toupai walked up behind her and watched her amusedly. “Are you trying to count to see if there is less? Whether I’ve secretly used some?” Gu Sheng nervously answered him, “No... I just wanted to feel to see if... you’ve ever pricked them with a needle...”

### Scene 7

Regarding those several hundred “little packages.” They were having a group dinner. Mu Mu arrived late and then pulled out a large box from his backpack. “My friend does product quality testing. This week, he is sample testing this.” He opened the box. Everyone was speechless. Mu Mu: “After the random sampling is done, the ones left over have no use.” He casually pushed the box over to Qiang Qing Ci. “You need this more than the rest of us.”..... Mu Mu never understood that, this casual sentence of his bolstered one SAMA but shot down an entire table of SAMAs.

### Scene 8

(March 6, 2014) One day, Mu Mu wanted to make it clear that he was indeed a straight male, so he posted in Weibo: I prefer the pure, innocent type. The type that is cute and makes you want to love them dearly. The most important part though is, I like someone who likes to wear red skirts. Five seconds later, fans who shipped Mo Bai and Mu Mu very excitedly posted a picture of Mo Bai crossplaying Xiu Xiu from Sword 3 and also took a screenshot of Mu Mu’s Weibo post as evidence. While the fans’ blood were boiling in excitement, Mo Bai also enthusiastically re-tweeted their post with an @ Mu Mu: Oh, so you like that style. That’s easy.



[Crossplaying is a male cosplaying a female or vice versa.]

### Scene 9

(March 6, 2014) Every time Sheng Sheng Man was on singing duty, the YY room would be bursting with the number of people in it, all of them hardcore fans of Qiang Qing Ci who wanted to hear his voice. Sheng Sheng felt sorry for his fans, so one day, she secretly turned on her mike and deliberately lead Qiang Qing Ci, who was behind her, along so that he would say something for everyone to hear. “You were recording yesterday. Were there any good lines that you spoke?” “Can’t really remember.” He walked up beside the computer and suddenly, in a low voice, coaxingly invited, “Done singing? Want to go sleep for a little while? ...” And so, everyone got their wish and heard everything...

### Scene 10

(March 18, 2014) Ever since Qiang Qing Ci had his golden master, there were always fans who especially did not support him on this and would leave badmouthing comments..... Sheng Sheng felt very distressed over this. One day, Qiang Qing Ci posted a PaPa recording [see Chapter 23, footnote 1]. His voice was low and cold. “Walking alone at night. Not really used to it.” Instantly, all his fans were heartbroken for him and flooded the comments with the same message: Golden Pig, hurry home... Don’t let our DaRen walk alone at night T.T... From then on, no one came to leave any badmouthing messages...

#DiscussQiangQingCisPerfectActingSkills#

### Scene 11

(Nov 13, 2014) The big doctor went out of country for half a year to further his studies. Gu Sheng developed a habit where she would save every WeChat message he sent her and only listen to them one at a time, spaced over a period of time. Even the ones she had listened to before, when she was bored and had nothing to do, she would re-listen to, justifying her actions with, “Once your biggest idol, forever your biggest idol.” When Geng Xiaoxing found out about this, she secretly told Jue Mei, and then Jue Mei secretly told Toupai. The result was, the next day, Gu

Sheng discovered her WeChat had more than 1000 new voice messages and they all came from Qiang Qing Ci...

### Scene 12

(February 1, 2015) Sheng Sheng's first time meeting her future mother-in-law. Mother-in-law held onto her hand and revealed that she had already been her fan on Weibo for a long time. More than 10,000 fans. So amazing! Her heart silently dripping blood, Sheng Sheng glanced over at Toupai, who was sitting in the living room flipping through a magazine and acting like nothing had happened... If her lips had not been sealed ahead of time, she would definitely have pointed out the true god there: "Your son is the one who's dressed in all sorts of gold and silver with several hundreds of thousand fans. I'm just made out of clay in comparison and not worth any money..."

Hoju: How do you think Toupai "sealed" Sheng Sheng's lips? And if she's a fan, shouldn't Mama Mo know that Sheng Sheng Man is dating the famous Qiang Qing Ci?

### Scene 13

(February 1, 2015) Qiang Qing Ci: "Sheng Sheng?" She was sick with a sore throat but did not want to take medication, so she could only nod in answer. Him: "Do you want to sing another duet with me?" She nodded. "Do you want it so that, even if I am not home at night, you can still lie on this bed and talk to me on the phone?" Blushing, she nodded her head. "Come here. Take your medicine." He bit a pill between his teeth and successfully fed it into her mouth... "Do you need me to feed you your water, too?" She immediately picked up her glass of water and – gulp, gulp – downed it fiercely.

Scene 14 – MBFB asked fans what they wanted for a Lunar New Year's present. Everyone had requests for new scenes from their various favourite novel(s). In the end, she posted a giant post with a scene each for the leads from nearly every single one of her novels, in which a theoretical email was sent out to them asking them to recap the first night they did it. Here is the one for Really, Really Miss You.

(February 19, 2015, Lunar New Year's Day at 12:01am) On a certain day, in the middle of the night, Mo Bao Fei Bao sent an email to all the leads of her novels: "Hey dears, do you still remember that night?"

Gu Sheng: "The author... um, she didn't write it..."

Mo Qingcheng: "She doesn't need to. It happens every night."

Gu Sheng: "Not... every night, right?"

Mo Qingcheng: (picks her up from in front of the computer into his arms) "Really? Are you sure you're not remembering wrong?"

Gu Sheng: "Well, for example, when you have to work overtime... we won't do it."

Mo Qingcheng: "Oh? (lowers his voice and gently, dotingly blows her ear) "Are you filing a complaint? How about this? You keep note in an electronic calendar and whatever I miss, I'll make up to you. I..... willingly and happily will make it up to you."

Scene 15 – "Bi dong" is an Internet slang used to describe a scene where someone is pressed up against a wall and kissed. "Bi" means wall and "dong" is an onomatopoeia to describe the sound of bumping into the wall. It is a term that has been around for a while but recently has been very popular because of the drama, My Sunshine and the now famous scene in episode 8 (gifs and all to help you visualize ).

(February 28, 2015) In regards to "bi dong". He had arrived home from the hospital late one night. As Sheng Sheng rubbed her eyes and crawled out of bed to cook a late night meal for him, she was suddenly pulled back. Her back thumped into the wall and she heard his voice beside her ear. "You said on Weibo, you like 'bi dong'?"

Sheng Sheng: "....."

Toupai: "Legs need to be pressed together?"

Sheng Sheng: "No....."

Toupai: "What about our upper bodies? Is this position correct?"

Sheng Sheng: "Mm....."

Toupai lowered his head: “Next, I am free to take it from here as I please?”

## Really, Really Miss You Storyline Song

From what I understand, Really, Really Miss You really was one of the first, if not the first, novels to focus on the 2-D world of CVs. A new category of novels has sprung up in the last year or so called “wang pei” or “online voice acting”, but all the ones I’ve seen have come after RRMY.♥ How appropriate that a storyline song be made on it that tells the story of Toupai and Sheng Sheng.

This is truly a fan made cover song with original lyrics written for the novel, then posted in 5sing. The singers are kind of like Gu Sheng, amateur singers who aren’t huge in popularity but are having fun in the online singing world. They may or may not fit your ideal voice for Toupai and Sheng Sheng, but I commend the job they did. It’s made well enough that it has become the favourite song of my children of late. I have had to listen to it every\_single\_day. (See me banging my head on the wall?) My kids can recite dialogue taken straight from RRMY.

The song is called 闻言倾心 “Wen Yan Qing Xin” [To Hear the Voice and Fall In Love]. Lyric and dialogue translation below, blue for Toupai, red for Sheng Sheng, green for both.

[[<https://youtu.be/F2G2BmI4Rdg>]]

文案:

看完墨宝非宝的《很想很想你》就想为主角填一首歌了.....

作为第一部描写CV圈以及古风圈的小说, 简直经典!

Background:

After I read Mo Bao Fei Bao’s “Really, Really Miss You”, I really wanted to write the lyrics of a song for the leads...

As the first novel out there to write about the CV and ancient-style music entertainment circles, it is simply a classic!

(dialogue)

莫青成：声声慢，在吗？

Mo Qingcheng: Sheng Sheng Man, are you there?

顾声：嗯？

Gu Sheng: Hm?

莫青成：我爱你。你.....爱不爱我？

Mo Qing Cheng: I love you. Do you... love me?

顾声：我.....我爱.....你的声音。

Gu Sheng: I..... I love..... your voice.

莫青成：谢谢，我抱你下麦。

Mo Qingcheng: Thank you. I'll "hold" you off the mike now.

[00:27]那天 是你声音无意闯进我心头

That day, your voice unintentionally barged into my heart

[00:34]那天 是我再次遭遇你偶然出现

That day, I once again by chance encountered you

[00:41]是你 唤醒我心中的火焰决定让你沦陷

It was you, who awakened the fire in my heart and caused me to decide to surrender into it with you

[00:47]喧嚣世界里的唯一

The only one for me in this noisy world

[00:54]千万人中我唤出你名

Amid tens of thousands of people, I called out your name

[01:00]是我早就迫切演出的恶作剧

It's the little joke I have wanted to act out for a long time now

[01:08]而你短暂沉默的时间里

And in your brief moment of silence

[01:14]我看见自己的心在冷眼谑笑 多可气

I could see into my heart where I was inwardly laughing facetiously.  
How annoying of me!

[01:25]听你诚然说起独爱我的声音

When I heard that you indeed loved my voice alone

[01:32]窃喜的我却没说出那份愉悦

I was secretly thrilled but did not express that happiness that I felt

[01:38]我早已对你闻言倾心

Long ago, I had already heard your voice and my heart had fallen for  
you

[01:45]原谅我只想一步步朝你靠近

Forgive me, for I only wanted to, one step at a time, get closer to you

[01:52]让你慢慢掉进这名爱的陷阱

And cause you to slowly fall into this trap called "love"

[01:59]共我同吟一曲 上邪

To sing together with me a song – Shang Ye

[02:19]那天 是你问我什么时候听到你

That day, you asked me when I first heard your voice

[02:25]那天 是我低头安静站在你面前

That day, I stood there quietly, head lowered, before you

[02:32]是你 唤醒我心中的爱恋决定自我沦陷

It was you who awakened the love in my heart and made me decide to  
surrender myself

[02:39]喧嚣世界里的唯一

To the only one for me in this noisy world

[02:46]悄悄录下你未全半曲

I secretly recorded the half a song you sang

[02:51]在你面前小心清唱出我心意

Before you, I tentatively sang out the feelings of my heart

[02:59]而那流言纷飞时间里

But in that time when rumors and gossip were swirling

[03:06]我听见自己的心在卑微退怯 多可笑

I heard my heart cowardly try to retreat. How absurd of me!

[03:17]听你诚然说出独爱我的声音

When I heard that you indeed love my voice alone

[03:23]忐忑的我却说不出那份愉悦

I was nervous, but I could not express that happiness I felt

[03:29]我早已对你闻言倾心

Long ago, I had already heard your voice and my heart had fallen for you

[03:37]只能任自己一步步朝你靠近

I had no choice but to allow myself, one step at a time, to move closer to you

[03:44]怕我只是误会你无意的心情

Worried that I might have misunderstood your feelings

[03:49]却吟一曲声声慢 予我

But then, you sang a song with “Sheng Sheng Man” in it to me  
(dialogue)

莫青成：我很喜欢你，做我女朋友吧！

Mo Qingcheng: I like you a lot. Will you be my girlfriend?

顾声：……我们才见过几次……

Gu Sheng: ..... We've only seen each other a few times...

莫青成：这种事，和见面次数，没什么关系。

Mo Qingcheng: With this sort of thing, the number of times we've seen each other doesn't really matter

顾声：万一……不合适呢？

Gu Sheng: What if..... we aren't suitable for each other?

莫青成：万一，合适呢？

Mo Qingcheng: What if..... we are?

[04:24]听你诚然说出独爱我的声音

When I heard that you indeed loved my voice alone

[04:31]相识在我们相知之前的情景

And that we had known each other before we had even really become close

[04:37]却是对我闻言已倾心

Where you heard my voice and then your heart fell for me

[04:44]只是庆幸你一步步朝我靠近

I rejoiced that, one step at a time, you were moving closer to me

[04:51]让你(我)慢慢掉进这名爱的陷阱

So that you were (I was) slowly falling into that trap called "love"

[04:57]共我(你)同吟一曲 上邪

To sing together with me (you) a song – Shang Ye

[05:14]那天 是你声音无意闯进我心头

That day, your voice unintentionally barged into my heart

[05:21]那天 是你问我什么时候听到你

That day, you asked me when I first heard your voice

[05:28]那天 是你让我在声的海洋中砰然动心

That day, it was you who caused my heart, amid the vast ocean of voices, to flutter with stirred emotions



[05:35]成为我喜欢的唯一

And to become the one I love – the only one.

(dialogue)

莫青成：不开始，就不知道结局，对吗？

Mo Qingcheng: If we don't even start, we won't know the ending, right?

顾声：嗯.....

Gu Sheng: Mm-hmm.....

# Epilogue: Part 1

On the weekend, Gu Sheng went to the recording studio to wait for Mo Qingcheng to finish up his work.

When she stepped up to the reception desk, the girl raised her head, and seeing it was her, she instantly beamed, “Little Golden Master, you’re here?”

Gu Sheng immediately grew embarrassed.

This was Fei Shao’s territory, so this “Little Golden Master” thingy had obviously been a result of his teaching. She gave some sort of vague reply and then politely asked, “Is Qiang Qing Ci done yet?”

The girl shook her head and pointed at the door at the end of the corridor. “Still inside. Go on in.”

“Thanks.” After she said this, she stepped away and walked down the corridor.

She pushed open the door, but the people sitting on the couch did not know her and were not really paying attention to who had entered the room.

Only Fei Shao, who was wearing a headset, turned his head and waved at Gu Sheng, telling her quietly, “Recording’s all done. He’s just listening to it himself.”

Through the recording studio’s glass wall.

He sat behind the microphone, his head tilted downward, flipping through the script page by page.

That pair of deep but bright black eyes was lowered so that it was not possible to see any emotions within.

A large segment of what he had recorded was being played and could be heard in both the inner and outer rooms of the studio. His voice was low and gentle. “I have finished writing out ‘Rhapsody of the Imperial Park.’ Not a single word was missed... Shi Yi, say my name... I think, I must have

used my beautiful bones as an exchange for you to have unrivalled beauty, as an exchange for you to remember me, as an exchange for you to be able to utter my name when your lips moved...”

He suddenly made a gesture.

Fei Shao paused the recording.

“ ‘Beautiful bones, those with bone do not have skin, those with skin do not have bone.’ I’m going to record three more options of this sentence for you guys. All of you, listen to the feel of each of them.” In the instant he said this, he raised his head and saw her.

Suddenly, he gave a smile.

“Okay!” Fei Shao grinned gratefully. “Professional, oh, so professional.”

Ten minutes later, he pulled off his headset, hung it on the stand beside the microphone, and then stepped out of the recording room.

Gu Sheng rose from her chair, watching as he greeted those several men who were present before motioning to her. She walked over to him, and very naturally, he took her hand in his and left with her .

..... This was the first time he had initiated holding her hand out in public?

Gu Sheng felt that today’s atmosphere was a little strange.

Seeing that there was no one around when they reached the elevator lobby, she asked him in a quiet voice, “Did you immerse yourself too deeply into the role and now you can’t get out of it?”

He let out a chuckle. “Did I?”

“Something’s a little weird,” she mumbled.

“I want to get married.” His voice was rather low.

However, Gu Sheng had heard him only rather unclearly. His words had been like lightning that appeared in a flash before vanishing, and she was not very certain if she had heard correctly. But though she was uncertain, her heartbeat still grew irregular. She breathed lightly, wanting to ask but

not daring to. And he was behaving as if he had not said anything, only silently watching the elevator doors slide open before taking her hand and stepping inside with her...

On this weekend evening, it was rather busy out, and it was also raining.

Fortunately, he had driven today. As their car passed a bus stop, she wiped at the condensation on the window with her hand.

Just now, he had said...

He wanted to get married?

Was it true?

But I still haven't graduated yet, ah.

Yes, you could get married after you finished your undergraduate studies[1], but what would she tell her parents? And yes, Mom and Dad really, really, really liked him and even trusted his integrity so much that occasionally, they would allow her to stay over at his place on a weekend, but ... Marriage seemed a bit too significant of a step.

While she brooded over all these jumbled thoughts, the car suddenly swerved into a side street and pulled into a random parking spot on the side of the road.

"There's a car accident up front. I'm going to go take a look." He threw these words over his shoulder, unbuckled his seatbelt, and rushed out from the vehicle.

Only after he was completely drenched and crouching down beside several people who had sustained injuries to check them did she snap out of her daze, grab an umbrella, and also dash out. But the umbrella did not even get a chance to be put to use. He informed them of his status as a doctor and performed some basic first aid. He was kept busy for a long while, from beginning to end, and when the emergency response vehicles hurriedly arrived, he also communicated the situation to the people who jumped out.

The whole time, she had followed behind him but had not dared to get

too close, for fear that she would get in the way and just cause more trouble.

After the ambulances had left, the police vehicles still remained where they were to take care of the situation. Covered head to toe in muddy water and with blood smeared on him, he turned around to see her standing there dazedly, umbrella in hand but unopened. He could not help shaking his head as he pointed at the car. "Hurry and get back to the car."

She started out of her stupor and darted back to the car.

Mo Qingcheng removed his soiled jacket and tossed it into the backseat before sitting back into the vehicle. "Why did you run out with me? What if you caught a cold?"

Her mind was in a haze. She also did not know why she had followed after him. "I don't know either. I saw you run out so anxiously and just felt that I had to go with you."

"Hubby sings and wifey echoes[2]?" There was a hint of teasing in his voice.

"....." Embarrassed. She once again thought of...

Unfortunately, Toupai DaRen was acting as if nothing had happened, reaching for the tissue in the backseat and wiping at his hair and face.

She had already wiped herself down, and seeing his entire body dripping with water, she also yanked out several sheets, intending to help him dry off.

She had just pulled the tissue out of the box when her body was suddenly pinned against the back of her seat.

Because his hands had been soiled by blood, he did not touch her and only braced his arms on each side of her, his lips silently pressing against hers.

A long, intense kiss.

He closed his eyes.

He seemed to have encountered many things today. This morning, two

patients, one after another, could not be revived. Later, the drama he was providing the voice acting for had been so saddening. Then, there was the situation just a moment ago. And...

They had not seen each other for two weeks.

He was simply too busy, but he could not always have her come to his home either.

He missed her.

Really, particularly missed her.

He nibbled her lip, squeezing her body between his two elbows.

He missed her voice. He just missed her. He wanted to marry her, to keep her in his home so that at any time, when he returned to that place called “home,” he would be able to see her. Even if it was simply gazing upon her as she studied or wrote her thesis, watching as she sang on YY, or looking on as she faced her computer and sang over and over again to record her songs – these were all things he wanted.

So, the decision was settled then.

He let go of her.

The kiss had left Gu Sheng’s breathing somewhat ragged, and her eyes glimmered with moisture as she gazed dazedly at him.

There was a smile in his eyes?

Huh?

Just now, she had thought... he was a little unhappy?

How come suddenly, he...?

He left Gu Sheng feeling somewhat confused.

From within the car, he pulled out some alcohol swabs, and after he had wiped down his palms, the back of his hands, and each of his fingers, he gathered and put away all the trash. Then, he turned the steering wheel and pulled out of the parking spot. “What do you want to eat tonight?”

Huh?

She completely could not keep up with his rhythm, k? Toupai DaRen, could you...

Slow down your thinking just a little bit? cold sweat

“Eat, um... curry.” Just thinking about it made her crave it. The curry he made was super delicious. “Curry anything will be good. Mm-hmm.”

“Curry anything will be good?” He could not hold back his laughter. In a low, unhurried tone, he asked to confirm, “Are you sure about that?”

“.....” She choked on that and held her silence.

He let out another chuckle. It really looked like he was in an extremely good mood?

She snuck a glance at him.

He, however, was completely back to normal and simply carried on driving.

That night, Jue Mei was not home, so Mo Qingcheng did not sleep on the couch and simply went into Jue Mei’s room to sleep.

Before the sky was completely bright, Gu Sheng could already sense that there were footsteps.

Still sleepy, her eyes did not even open as she mumbled, “Don’t tell me he needs to do overtime again...”

They finally managed to have a weekend but...

But, really, she was only just saying that one sentence. In actuality, the next second, she had already prepared herself that, if he suddenly needed to work overtime like he had before, she would just dig up something for herself to eat quickly, go home to mooch a meal off there, and then pack up some snacks and return to school...

As her thoughts reached this point, a figure had already walked over to her bed, bent down, and in the most gorgeous and most tenderly soft voice, coaxed, “Time to get up.”

No overtime?

“..... Gonna sleep just a little bit more.” So sleepy, ah.

“Time to get up. Be good.” He lowered his tone even more, and using the voice she most loved to hear, he stated lightly, “We’re going to go get married.”

She thought she was dreaming.

Until she opened her eyes and saw his face. Her head ached from sleepiness, and she could not help rubbing it with her hand. “Was I dreaming just now? Or were you talking to me?”

He smiled and moved in closer to her. Almost whispering directly into her ear, he repeated another time, “We’re going to go get married.”

It was real?!

Her eyes suddenly flew open, and she was instantly wide awake.

And then, with his hand supporting her back to help her, she sat up. He handed her some clothes. “Wear this.”

Clothes from her home? Not the ones she had worn yesterday?

Bewilderedly, she took them from him. “I wasn’t wearing these yesterday.”

“I brought it from your home. For photos with a red background[3], it looks nicer if you wear this sort of white color.”

“.....”

“Your mom wants us to go home for dinner after we register our marriage and get the certificate.”

“.....”

“I meant, go to your home,” he continued to inform her before walking back over to stand before his wardrobe and stare at that rack of clothes, contemplating which outfit would be most suitable for him to wear for getting married. “My parents are out of town for some meetings. When they’re back, I’ll bring you there and we’ll have another dinner with them.”



“.....”

She sat there stupidly.

Get married? They were really getting married?

Now?

It was only a little past seven o'clock.

Mo Qingcheng was sucking on a throat lozenge, and occasionally, there would be the sound of the lozenge bumping against teeth.

While she continued her blank stares, he had already sat down on the other side of the bed. She felt a weight on her shoulder, and just like that, his chin was there resting on it as he said gently, “I missed a step.”

“..... Mm?” She finally managed to recover a bit of her awareness.

The warmth of his breath.

And his voice...

His voice was somewhat muffled and unclear but was very warm and gentle as it told her, “Til the different directions of the world no longer exist, ‘til the seas dry, only then will I cease to love you.”

Gu Sheng's face immediately flushed a deep red.

Just like when he had first said this sentence inside the recording studio and in front of all those people, she felt a nervous excitement.

That day, it had been the first time they had seen each other in person. This line that he had spontaneously improvised had stunned everyone.

And now...

“Sheng Sheng, marry me.”

“.....” She was unable to utter a sound.

She was even more unprepared and at a loss for how to respond than when she had heard they were leaving immediately to register their marriage.

“Sheng Sheng, will you...” This voice she loved most was beside her ear,

sincerely asking her, "... marry me?"

"..... Mm," she agreed softly.

"Okay. Go change now. We need to leave right away." He immediately stood. They needed to hurry so they could be the first ones there.

Their speed was even faster than when he needed to go to the hospital to work overtime. She followed his lead, and the entire time – from their arrival at the Civil Affairs Bureau, to the taking of their photographs, to, finally, the registration of their marriage and signing of the documents – she felt as if she was drifting in a haze. As the tip of her pen hovered above the paper, she stole a glance at him.

He had already neatly and efficiently written his signature on the paper and was now calmly looking at her.

They were really... getting married?

She was still drifting and drifting... until the back of her hand was enveloped by his palm and gently guided to sign the two words, "Gu Sheng" as well as today's date.

Hand in forms.

Two red booklets slowly printed from the machine.

Booklets handed back to them.

It was like a slow motion picture being played out frame by frame, stretching out the duration between each step. Happiness. Silence. Beating hearts. Stirring in the heart ... That one person, the love of her life, was by her side, watching with her as one step at a time their marriage certificate was produced. This was a scene she had never before even conceived of.

Mo Qingcheng carefully put away the official certificate that legally sanctioned them to cohabit and led her out of the Civil Affairs Bureau. They headed directly to the most expensive shopping centre where he picked out for her the ring he had already looked at far in advance. After trying it out on the spot, he also selected a plain men's wedding band and

placed it on his own hand.

Utterly as efficient as an assembly line operation.

Even on their way back home, Gu Sheng still could not figure out, when had he made all these preparations? ...

How come she'd had absolutely no idea?

.....

So... they were married now?

So, they were married... now?

With these words, her heartbeat slowly started to recover.

After the fact now, but her arms were feeling somewhat limp, and gently, she twisted the ring on her finger.

“Sheng Sheng?” His voice spoke her name. Very softly.

“Mm?”

Happy?”

“Mm-hmm...” She didn't even know what it felt like to breathe. “Happy.”

“It's good that you're happy.” He spoke in a low voice. With his left hand still on the steering wheel, he reached over with his right one and took her hand.

The small hand being encircled in his large one belonged to her, including that ring, which also belonged to her.

\*

[1] Legal age of marriage in China is 22 for men, 20 for women. In even the early 2000s, undergraduate students of post secondary education institutions were prohibited from marrying while they were studying. This blanket rule was abolished in Sept 2005 and students were allowed to marry, but there are still some schools that will ask those who do to leave the institution.

[2] 夫唱妇随 “fū chàng fù suí.” More accurately, this should be

translated as, “The husband sings and the wife shall chime in in agreement.” In the ancient patriarchal society of China, this was meant to say, a harmonious household was one in which the wife agreed with and submitted to everything her husband said. Later, this saying simply came to be used as a saying to describe a harmonious relationship between husband and wife.

[3] In China, all photos taken for a marriage certificate are against a red background.

\*

Additional Comments:

“It’s good that you’re happy.” Remember when Toupai said this? Haha... Yes, Hoju is in a quizzing mood lately.

## Epilogue: Part 2

After they received their marriage certificate, the following day, Gu Sheng and Doctor Mo arrived in Sanya.

This time, it was for a medical conference and knowledge exchange, and as a result, it was completely different from the previous time in Southeast Asia, being truly a vacation for only the two of them. Oh wait, no, no. For work. Work!

When they stepped into their hotel room, she discovered their balcony was facing the ocean.

Unfortunately, though, it was not a very good time to vacation here. The temperature was only in the teens, and the ocean wind was blowing strong. From a distance, the view of the ocean was not very attractive.

She turned around. Mo Qingcheng was already sitting peacefully on one of the lounge chairs and was motioning to her.

She stepped over to him. "So cold. When I was coming up just now, I saw the servers at the bar downstairs were even wearing fur..."

He casually answered, "Indeed, not a good season to be here. Why don't we go to the spa downstairs? They have a private husband and wife room."

"It should be 'private couples' room'..." she corrected him gently.

He gave an "oh" and asked, "Not 'husband and wife'?"

She squatted down in front of him, patting him on the jaw and teasing, "Dada, I'm immune to you now, you know. It is 'couples' room.' I saw it very clearly." After saying this, she even could not help letting out a little giggle.

He changed to a different sitting posture, with one hand propping his chin. "Really?"

Oh no, she was done for. He had switched to his cold, dignified emperor's voice... He casually took her hand in his, and slid his own hand

down to encircle the band on her ring finger, slowly turning it. "It's really not 'husband and wife'?"

She suddenly clued in. He was talking about that.

On her finger, the ring slowly rotated. She was still in somewhat of a daze.

If she said he had duped her into their marriage registration, would his hundreds of thousands of fans take headshots at her? But it was true...

So neat, quick, and easy. And just like that, their marriage certificate was in hand.

And before she had gotten used to the idea that they were legally recognized as husband and wife now, they had flown here to Sanya?

The ocean wind was blowing in gusts into the balcony.

"What are you thinking about?" His finger twirled her long strands of hair.

She felt a little self-conscious about telling him that she was still thinking about the course of events for yesterday's marriage registration, especially that moment when they had taken their marriage photograph and the old grandpa had beamed at them while directing them on how to nestle closer together.

She gazed down at his fingers. Fingers where each contour was clearly defined. Hands that belonged to a doctor.

And a very nice-looking pair of doctor's hands at that.

For the first time, she took the lead, reaching out her arms and wrapping them around his neck. Softly, by his ear, she whispered, "I'm thinking... we're actually married."

He chuckled, "Don't tell me you had other options."

She was taken aback briefly, but very soon, her cheeks were blushing.

It seemed... this was the first time he had said that. Wait, no. He had said it before, very early on. Not long after they had met each other, he

had said it, but at the time, it had been a joke.

“Mind’s wandered again?” He seemed a little displeased.

‘I was thinking about... the first time you hit on me,” she hurriedly explained.

“Hit on you?”

Um, that wasn’t quite right. She discovered that, more and more, she really didn’t let her brain filter her words for her first. “I mean, that time we just met. Rehearsing script.” She felt a little shy about saying those three words and had to take a long, roundabout way before she could manage to explain what she meant.

For a moment, silence filled the air around them.

It was a little cold.

Worried that they would catch a cold since both of them were wearing only short sleeves and shorts, she wanted to climb off from on top of him and tow him back inside the room. But she had just moved to stand when, unexpectedly, he pulled her back into his arms.

“Sheng Sheng Man...” He nibbled on her little ear.

“Hmm?” The palms of her hands were somewhat numb and tingly.

“I love you.” His voice resonated slightly with a gentle warmth that seemed to cast a spell. “Do you... love me?”

In that instant, it seemed like time had suddenly turned back.

They had returned to the very beginning... Two people, separated by the vast Internet, carrying out this dialogue.

As if, right now, they were not in Sanya but in front of their computers. He had not yet shown his face to her, and she did not know that, from the beginning, he had already known her name and had wanted her, one step at a time, to fall in love with him.

“Let’s go back in the room,” he said softly.

Her heartbeat was getting louder and louder.

Her heart rate, though, was getting slower and slower...

His words had made her body grow somewhat weak.

“Don’t want to go in? You want it to be out here?”

“..... No.” She tried to wriggle out of his embrace.

Oh gawd, out on the balcony...

Even though it was completely enclosed and no one could see into it, still, that was just too...

Unfortunately, Toupai DaRen seemed to feel that this was a very good place. It would seem that this most significant of nights should also carry a slightly different ambience. He did not give her any opportunity to refuse, directly using action instead to convey his resolve.

Continuously, beside her ear, there was the sound of his voice, speaking to her softly. He called her Sheng Sheng, called her Sheng Sheng Man, called her Gu Sheng, called her baby. Whispering, doting, beguiling, and containing a sense of desire that he did not wish at all to hide...

Since they had been together, he had always halted himself at the final moment.

Regardless of how many times they had shared the same bed, he had always refused to cross that boundary by even a single step.

Until this evening.

The light inside the room passed through the glass balcony door and shone upon her. Gradually, everything grew still.

Feeling slightly puzzled, she nervously opened her eyes to see him, framed against the sunlight behind him, face to face with her. “Sheng Sheng...” He was completely stirred by his desires and emotions now, and he did not conceal this at all as he gazed intently at her. “Be good. Let me see.” She bit down on her lip and closed her eyes, listening as the sound of her breathing intermingled with his... Slowly, she at last loosened her two hands, which had been gripping his shirt tightly...

No longer resisting.



.....

When he finally carried her into the room, her entire body felt as if it could fall apart, and she really did not even want to lift a single finger in the slightest. All she knew was that he was holding her in his embrace. And then, after a little while, it happened all over again. Not knowing whether to laugh or cry and unable even to lift her eyelids, she begged for mercy. "I'm really sleepy..."

In a low and husky voice, he coaxed her.

She seemed to hear herself protest but at the same time, also seemed to feel that she had actually fallen asleep. In the end, she was uncertain whether she truly had been dreaming or that it had been real and he simply did not feel exhaustion. When she awoke again, the sky was already dark.

Where they were going to have dinner was the question.

Downstairs in the hotel restaurant, she glanced through the menu of dishes the server had recommended and could not resist sighing silently. Too expensive!

The man beside her did not seem to care too much about the prices. After all, in his mind, this was their true honeymoon vacation. Unfortunately, Gu Sheng, who was still a not-yet-graduated student, was already thoroughly conscious of her role as his wife and quickly put down the menu, grabbed his hand, and hightailed it out of there.

Really, it didn't matter at all what they ate.

Simply having his hand held by hers like this as they walked down a street where no one knew them – that was what was truly fulfilling.

The two of them strolled along to a place where restaurants congregated in large numbers, selected one that specialized in seafood, and sat down in it. Mo Qingcheng, the seafood lover, had very soon ordered enough to fill a large table. She glanced at the prices on those water tanks of live seafood and once again wanted to.....

"This afternoon was really tiring." He casually leaned his body weight

onto her. "I need to replenish my energy."

"....." Her face instantly grew crimson all the way to her ears.

"What are you thinking about?" His voice was low and a hint of a teasing tone could be heard at the end of his sentence.

"....." She immediately sat down and did not dare entertain the idea of having him change restaurants again.

Dishes of various types of periwinkles and snails were served up onto the table...

She finally discovered the extent to which Mo Qingcheng knew how to eat.

Snail meat that should clearly have been very tiring and very hard to get out of the shell, in his hands, required practically no effort at all. Two seconds and then he would have one taken care of. She worked hard for half a minute until the snail meat inside was mashed from her poking, but still, she had not pulled out a single one...

Until, a toothpick was extended in front of her.

He had personally picked out the meat with the toothpick and brought it up to her lips.

She lowered her eyes, bit down on it, and slid it into her mouth.

"Taste good?" He served up another one to her.

"Mm." It honestly tasted so good.

Without prompting, she stretched her head over and pulled the next one into her mouth. Before she even experienced its taste, though, he leaned over and "ate" both her tongue and the snail meat back into his own mouth. And then, he let go of her, grinning slightly. "Tasty, indeed."

How come... there was this feeling... that they were blatantly doing public display of affection?

And displaying it so...

As she silently shifted away a little bit, she felt her mobile phone

vibrate once.

A special notification appeared on the screen. He had posted on Weibo?

That Weibo of his that he never updated, even in ten thousand years... Don't tell me... Oh gawd!

Hastily, she threw a glance over at him. He had on an innocent look as he continued, with lowered head, to calmly and unhurriedly pick the snail meat out of the shells for her to eat. She didn't dare look...

"What did you post?"

He continued eating. "A few words."

With that one response, he managed to choke off any words she might have wanted to say, and she decided she would feel better if she went to take a look.

The result: the instant she opened up her Weibo, she was madly inundated with @ from all directions.

And his so-called "few words" were actually... truly just a few words...

Qiang Qing Ci: Status: married. smile

Below his post was an overwhelming barrage of congratulatory words and cries of heartbreak.

In particular, the several people she followed on Weibo all popped up together, as if they had arranged it.

Fei Shao: @ShengShengMan. Whoa! Is it a real marriage? How does it feel?

Dou Dou Dou Bing: @ShengShengMan... teary-eyed DaRen is your Weibo just for flaunting your lovey-dovey relationship? Do you still remember us your old playmates or your association huh huh huh huh?

Wwwwk: @ShengShengMan. Mark. They're in Sanya.

Feng Ya Song: @ShengShengMan. I just went to use the dang toilet. How did you manage to suddenly be married? It's the middle of the night already. Did you hop on the bus first and go back afterwards to get your

ticket[1] and then claimed you were married already? Tell me the truth!

Jue Mei Sha Yi: @ShengShengMan... When did this happen?

Geng Xiaoxing: @ShengShengMan. Just feebly going to mark here. When did this happen, ah? ...

She.....

Suddenly, another Weibo post came in. Wait, no. It was post after post... Post after post...

The total number of posts in his Weibo was only a hundred and something, you know? Ten days to a half a month could pass without a single piece of news or word from him. But today, he was actually spamming the screen, and on top of that, they were all replies! Not a single comment was missed! Every single one was given a reply!

Lined up, one after another, down the entire screen were all his replies...

Qiang Qing Ci: Very good. // Fei Shao: @ShengShengMan. Whoa! Is it a real marriage? How does it feel?

Qiang Qing Ci: Yes. // Dou Dou Dou Bing: @ShengShengMan... teary-eyed DaRen is your Weibo just for flaunting your lovey-dovey relationship? Do you still remember us, your old playmates, or your association huh huh huh huh?

Qiang Qing Ci: On business and while we're here, a little honeymoon, too. // Wwwwk: @ShengShengMan. Mark. They're in Sanya.

Qiang Qing Ci: No. Registered our marriage yesterday. // Feng Ya Song: @ShengShengMan. I just went to use the dang toilet. How did you manage to suddenly be married? It's the middle of the night already. Did you hop on the bus first and go back afterwards to get your ticket and then claimed you were married already? Tell me the truth!

Qiang Qing Ci: Same as previous post. // Jue Mei Sha Yi: @ShengShengMan... When did this happen?

Qiang Qing Ci: Same as previous post. // Geng Xiaoxing: @ShengShengMan. Just feebly going to mark here. When did this happen,

ah? ...

.....

Deep breaths. Deep breaths.

Most importantly, there were already people accusing her over why she had not re-tweeted this post yet.

But, she really was not used to such public flaunting of their love. Each time she saw him post something on Weibo, she already felt guilty. She felt like she had already undeservingly been given an amazingly good thing and it should not be flaunted. If she flaunted it, then she truly would incur the wrath of both the gods and man.

She wrestled with herself. To re-tweet or not re-tweet?

Beside her, the real culprit of this whole situation – the Unrivalled Allure Toupai DaRen – suddenly ordered a bottle of beer. Pouring some into a glass, he teased her, “Want to drink our wedding wine[2]?”

She got embarrassed.

Don't say it so loudly ...

And especially saying it with such a gorgeous-sounding voice!

He poured two full glasses of beer. Raising his own glass, he stared into her eyes and, one word, one sentence at a time, said, “To our happy marriage. May we forever be blessed with happiness.”

When he finished saying this, he gazed fixedly upon her, not speaking anymore.

In that moment, the entire world seemed to fall into quietness. The astonishment from all their friends, the congratulations and heartbreak of all the fans, and even the people at the neighbouring tables who had watched them eating their snail meat – all of these faded away.

He, Mo Qingcheng, was gazing so seriously, so sincerely at her, wishing her blessings of happiness as well as wishing himself happiness.

Yes, he was wishing the two of them – together – happiness.

She held the icy cold glass, raised it, and lightly clinked it against his.

A clear sound.

Pure, yet simple.

“To our happy marriage,” she echoed softly. “May we forever be blessed with happiness.”

\*

[1]先上车后补票. A slang phrase. “To hop on the bus first” is saying that a guy has been physically intimate with a girl prior to marriage (and often, is referring to an unplanned pregnancy) , and to “go back afterwards to get your ticket” is saying, after the fact, the guy and girl get married and become legitimate to “ride the bus.”

[2]交杯酒 “jiao bei jiu.” In a traditional Chinese wedding ceremony, after the groom has entered the nuptial chambers where his bride awaits, the two will drink a wine together. They would interlink their arms that were holding the wine cups, and in that position, they would drink the wine. Now, in modern times, this tradition is no longer necessarily reserved for the moment within the nuptial chambers and is often performed before the guests of the wedding. Toupai is teasingly asking if Sheng Sheng wants to interlink her arm with his and drink the beer with him, as husband and wife. Very simplistically, I’ve translated this entire action, “drinking wedding wine.”

\*

Additional Comments:

happy sigh So glad the friends made a little Weibo appearance like before. Loved the ending. ♥♥

I’ve said this before, but just in case you missed it, due to copyright reasons, the novel was completely revised so that all the real songs sung by 2-D world singers in real life were removed and replaced with songs and lyrics made up by Mo Bao Fei Bao. The only exception is “Song Without an End”, I believe, which still remains in the novel. Even the official online copy has been revised.

I cried about it before since part of the magic of this story was the beautiful music that I would play as I read, but it is understandable. Since I've been head down and just translating, I still haven't read through the entire published novel, but I did flip to the very important recording studio and duet singing scene to see what replaced my favourite "Shang Ye." I got a pleasant consolation.

The new, made-up song is called 与君归 "To Share Your Ending." Three characters that say, "wherever the journey of life takes you, I choose to share your ending, whatever it may be." Beautiful, huh?

Excerpts of the published novel from what were chapter 18 and 19 of the online version: "Mm. Sure," Toupai agreed, not showing any awkwardness. "We can upload it onto 5sing after we are done recording. Consider it as a Valentine's Day gift to the fans."

Valentine's Day... gift...

Alright... Many DaRen in the online world liked to do something on special occasions like Valentine's Day, Children's Day, etc. Normal, totally normal.

Gu Sheng was still digesting this suggestion, but he, after thinking briefly, stated the name of a song. "Yu Jun Gui [To Share Your Ending]... okay with you?"

That name stated from his lips seemed to carry a heartrending sense of bleakness.

The heckling crowd surrounding them went completely quiet.

Wasn't this just their first meeting? And already they were going "to share an ending" wha...?

Really. So. Attention-Grabbing.

And skipping ahead a little bit to when they start singing:

Very quickly, the musical intro of the song could be heard.

With one hand on the microphone's frame, Mo Qingcheng finally started singing the first line along with the background music: "A

thousand years of scrolls of history will scribe things of family, country, and the world Yet they cannot be used in exchange to bring back your hands holding a cup of tea... ”

When he opened his mouth to sing the first note, Gu Sheng swore she clearly heard her own heartbeat.

Seriously, it sounded so good it could make people cry.

Effortless high notes that carried an intense sense of anguish and unwillingness to let go.

He even gave the listeners the feeling that he was the prince in the story, who had someone whom he loved dearly but could not declare his love for. He was her teacher, was the one whom she loved with all her heart, but between the good of the common people and the one he loved, he had no choice but to choose the former. He had to watch as she left, to let her go to marry the crown prince...

Gu Sheng was a person who loved music, and at the same time, she loved any stories set in the ancient times.

The cruelest thing in the world, perhaps, was after having possessed something... to lose it again. If one had never experienced those beautiful feelings before, they would not be etched into the bones and engraved on the heart. And then to use a knife and slice away, one inch at a time, those veins and bones that were joined together because of love. That was really too cruel.

As she sang this song, she could not help looking straight up at Mo Qingcheng.

Mo Qingcheng's deep black eyes that turned up at the outer edges also carried her reflection in them.

As the two of them neared the end of the song, that gentle yet sorrowful section, she deliberately sang offbeat to Mo Qingcheng. His male voice sang first followed by her clear and somewhat mournful repetition the end of each line of lyrics.

“In the tower, with several strokes of the brush



The entire 'Rhapsody of the Imperial Park' now remains

The chapters of two lifetimes come to a close

And I vow to share the same ending as you..."

As Gu Sheng sang the last note, she found she was having difficulties removing herself from the story. But then, to her surprise, she heard Toupai unexpectedly start to speak some lines. In astonishment, she lifted her head to gaze at him.

It was as if yellow sand filled the sky and a thousand years had passed, and he, alone astride his horse, was turning to look back sorrowfully.

"Shi Yi—"

He was adding a monologue...

In Mo Qingcheng's voice, she had a sense of rapport, as if he, too, was already captured within this story.

A thousand years of desolation, when even that stretch of white bones had become as sand, yet in the end, this could not compare to even her name alone.

He looked straight into her eyes and told her, "'Til the different directions of the world no longer exist, 'til the seas dry, only then will I cease to love you."

The background music suddenly came to an end, highlighting this last monologue.

As in the lyrics, Mo Qingcheng's eyes seemed as if filled with an immeasurably deep love, and once you looked directly into them, it was simply impossible to resist him.

Gu Sheng's face immediately flushed a deep red...

She watched as he turned around and addressed the recording engineer. "It's good."

Beautiful Bones fans, did you like that? In the past life, Eleven shared Xiao Nanchen Prince's ending and chose death after the injustice against

him. In the present life, Shi Yi also gets to share Zhousheng Chen's ending, but this time, with fate's kindness, their ending is one that is mundane, ordinary, uninteresting... a blessing of happiness – together. Just like Toupai and Sheng Sheng.♥

Lastly, besides the additional epilogue the published book included most of the Weibo random scenes I had posted, plus an adorable little booklet (first pic below) of chibi drawings of Toupai and Sheng Sheng and food and a poster of the gang on their vacation in Southeast Asia. These are just a handful of the chibis as only a some were posted online on Mo Bao Fei Bao's blog, including the cover photo of this post, and I didn't get to taking a picture of each page. I did take a pic of my copy of the poster for you to see, but please forgive the low quality. (Any guesses at who's



who in the poster?)

Cover of the booklet of chibis



Spicy crispy skin fish



Beef curry with vermicelli in soup



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Toupai DaRen feeding his little golden pig a strawberry



Yogurt with fruit chunks



Coconut rice



Yogurt drink with fruit chunks

真爱比wifi重要  
True love is more important than wifi

想睡会儿吗？

Want to sleep for a while?



“乖起床了，我们去结婚”

Be good. Time to get up. We're going to go get married.



Coconut rice



Spicy crispy skin fish

一下滑看菜谱  
Scroll down to see the recipe

Status: married.  
\*smile\*  
已婚，笑



Rum ice cream

@望宝非宝书友会



# Credits

Translator: [Hui3r](#)

Epub: [Estevam](#) / [dotNOVEL](#)